

NEW COLUMNS BY BARBARA EHRENREICH & LAURA FLANDERS

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

April 11, 1999

Eastern Europe: Is the Revolution Over?

Vladimir Tismaneanu
George Kenney
Fred Weir
Tony Weslowsky



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IN THESE TIMES

1999

Historic APPEAL TO REASON Campaign

Dear In These Times Reader:

You're surrounded by media with backward priorities, newsmakers more concerned about the bottom line than the front page. You've seen the results: tabloid publications masquerading as real news. The creeping media monopoly seems inevitable—but it's not. At *In These Times*, we would like to challenge this state of affairs.

We're calling our effort the Appeal to Reason Campaign, following in the footsteps of that legendary weekly newspaper published at the turn of the century in Girard, Kansas. The *Appeal to Reason* reached 750,000 subscribers in its heyday with the help of committed readers, an "Appeal Army" that spread word about the newspaper. Our immediate goal is, in comparison, a modest one: With your support, we aim to triple our readership over the next three years.

There are many reasons why *In These Times* shouldn't exist. In the past few decades, many magazines on the left have perished. Given the corporate domination of media markets, the fierce competition among commercial publications and a narrowing spectrum of serious debate about public policy, it's clear that simply by surviving for 23 years, we have beaten the odds.

We have been able to continue publishing only because of our committed subscribers and donors. This support from our readers has allowed us to build an award-winning magazine with a proud history of journalistic achievement.

Dedicated supporters often mention *In These Times* to their friends and learn that many potential readers have never heard of us. We want to reach a much wider circle of subscribers,

especially younger readers. We also want *In These Times* to be found in many more schools and libraries around the country.

We believe that a unique political situation now exists. Most Americans are disillusioned, even disgusted, with the leadership of both political parties. A growing number of people are open to alternative views and visions—and many are looking for information and ideas that they can't get on the newsstands or television.

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In These Times (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 23, No. 9-10) went to press on March 12, for newsstand sales March 22 to April 11, 1999.

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Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). Call (800) 827-0270.

All correspondence should be sent to:
 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.
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For back issues and advertising rates, call toll free (888) READ-ITT. Available back issues are \$3 each, \$5 each overseas. Complete issues and volumes of *In These Times* are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. *In These Times* is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and the Left Index.

On the Web at: <http://www.inthesetimes.com>



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Y2K2getherness

It's surprising for a socialist-bent magazine to miss a big point and opportunity in Craig Aaron's article on Y2K ("Apocalypse for Sale," Feb. 21). It's true that there is fear mongering and that some people are taking a survivalist, "run for the hills" attitude. And there are a lot of folks in denial. Aaron seems to be among them.

No one knows exactly what is going to happen with Y2K. We are going into a big unknown that may affect the entire infrastructure that we take for granted every day. The only thing we do know is the date. This is creating chaos and confusion—that's the opportunity. Most community Y2K task forces, like the one in Santa Cruz, are working on providing for all people in the community. Beginning with individual and neighborhood readiness, we bring awareness and help to the elderly, schools, the poor and the homeless.

Y2K can be "the end of the world as we know it" in a very positive way. When the infrastructure is on rocky ground we can use it to evolve together, manifesting the dreams of kinder, more sustainable social structure for all of us.

Hina Pendle
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Craig Aaron's self-satisfied dismissal of the Y2K problem was disappointing. How true that only those of us with disposable incomes can buy all those survival supplies and haul them home in our minivans. All the more reason for serious planning to protect the vulnerable—

which I thought was the message of the lampooned *Utne Reader* pamphlet. While jokes about the individualist religious right might make us feel superior, they won't teach us a strategy for sharing in case emergencies do break out.

Elizabeth Ely
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Toxic Antidote

Laura Orlando writes how locals are fighting back against the EPA promoting the dumping of toxic sludge ("Toxic Avengers," Feb. 21). But she chooses not to question the root cause of this "crisis." Why are corporations allowed to discharge their toxins into municipal wastewater treatment systems in the first place?

Corporations should be required to treat their own wastes, at their own expense, be forbidden to make toxic products for profit, and not be allowed to force taxpayers or farmers to pay for their cleanup. The "toxic sludge disposal crisis" is nothing more than yet another example of how corporations socialize their costs while we privatize their profits. Its solution could not be more obvious.

Jon Ball
Boston

A Wobbly Scorned

In her article on the "critical alliance" that has come together in support of striking Kaiser Aluminum workers ("Common Ground," Feb. 21), Christine Keyser makes an egregious omission. The coalition is made up of three groups, Earth First!, the United Steelworkers of

The Winner Is ...

For the second year in a row, *In These Times* has been awarded first place on Project Censored's list of the most under-reported stories of the year. Managing editor Joel Bleifuss, who has won more Project Censored awards than any other individual journalist, topped the list this year with his exposé on the threat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) ("Building the Global Economy," Jan. 11, 1998).

In other news, contributing editor Juan Gonzalez won the 1998 George W. Polk Award for commentary, one of the most prestigious awards in journalism, for his ongoing coverage of New York's poor and disenfranchised as a columnist for the *Daily News*.

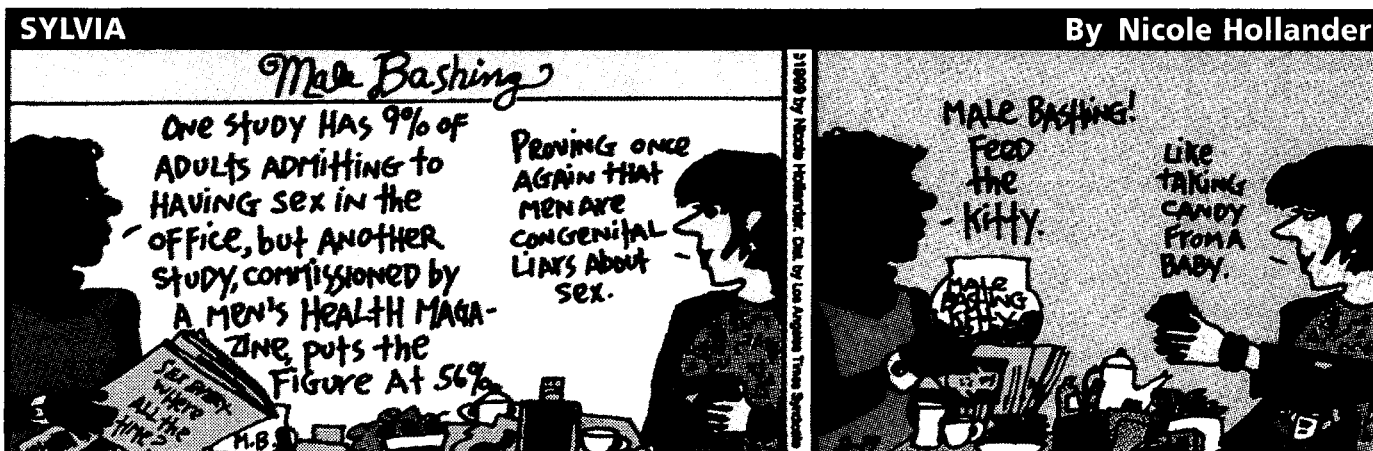
Congratulations, Joel and Juan.

America, and the Industrial Workers of the World. However, the IWW is mentioned nowhere in the report. The "flotilla of Earth First! vessels" described in the context of the Port of Tacoma action, for example, were actually piloted by steelworkers and Wobblies.

Andrew Neerman
Olympia, Wash.

Addendum

The March 7 cover story, "Phantom Menace" by Ira Shorr, was funded by a grant from the Puffin Foundation. We thank them for their ongoing support.



The Numbers Game

In recent weeks, congressional Republicans discovered the long-standing practice of accounting for Social Security funds as if they were general revenue. The Republicans are using this revelation to undermine the Clinton administration's proposals to invest some of the current budget surplus in education and other socially desirable programs. Having previously ignored the squandering of Social Security revenues, they want to be truthful for their own retrograde political ends. Though slimy, this effort provides an opportunity to look at the Social Security system honestly and to seek equitable solutions to its problems.

The surplus of Social Security tax receipts over the money paid out in benefits always has been put in a special fund to pay for the years when benefit payments might exceed receipts. Technically, the surplus is used to buy special Treasury bonds, which are to be redeemed when the surplus becomes a deficit at some future date. But for more than 30 years that has been a fiction, a government sleight of hand. President Lyndon Johnson used the Social Security surplus to hide the rapidly escalating cost of the war against Vietnam. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush disguised their military-driven deficits the same way. They simply merged that surplus with general revenues, thereby hiding the true extent of the federal budget deficit.

This practice continues today. Last year, the Clinton administration claimed to have a budget surplus of \$70 billion, but that was achieved only by counting the Social Security surplus of \$99 billion as part of general revenue. In other words, without including the Social Security tax receipts, the surplus was actually a \$29 billion deficit.

Some on the left argue that this makes no difference. After all, the Social Security surplus is invested in Treasury bonds, so that even if the surplus were not merged with general revenue, the government would still have to come up with the money to pay off these bonds if the fund started running a deficit in the future. Let's say that this were to happen in 2030. Then the government either would have to raise taxes to meet its obligations to those reaching the age of eligibility, or it would have to print more money.

But there are problems with both scenarios. On the one hand, printing more money in 2030 would greatly increase the money supply, leading to inflation. On the other, raising taxes would amount to double taxation for these benefits—the first time when taxes were withheld from wages, the second when it became necessary to raise new money to pay the benefits.

And there's the problem. In reality, Social Security taxes are simply an extortionate form of regressive tax-

ation that falls most heavily on all those who earn less than \$68,400 per year, and especially on the lowest-paid workers. The Social Security tax is 15 percent, half of which is paid by employees and half by employers. Thus, low-wage workers who pay no income taxes are actually paying a 7.5 percent income tax, while those in the 15 percent tax bracket are paying 22.5 percent, and those paying 25 percent are really paying 32.5 percent. Meanwhile, those who earn more than the \$68,400 cutoff are relieved of this burden for everything earned above that figure. Similarly, millions of small employers are also burdened with the 7.5 percent matching tax on the wages they pay their employees. For many small businesses who, unlike giant corporations, cannot pass this cost on to consumers, this is a crushing expense, one that can easily force marginal companies out of business.

One possible partial solution to this blatantly unfair system would be to invest the Social Security surplus in the private market—in state or municipal bonds used for infrastructure development or in corporate bonds or stocks. The virtue of this solution is that the interest on these investments, and the profits on stocks, would come from private sources, not from federal

In reality, Social Security taxes are simply an extortionate form of regressive taxation that falls most heavily on all those who earn less than \$68,400 per year.

taxes. And if the surplus becomes a deficit, the money needed to pay out benefits would then come from the corporations and banks, or from state and city bondholders. In addition, such a scheme would put the federal government in a position to use its investments to exert pressure on the private sector for the public good. Of course, the downside, of having the government play the market with the Social Security surplus is that if the market crashes, the taxpayers will be left holding the bag.

The better solution would simply be to eliminate all Social Security taxes, increase progressive income taxes and to pay out guaranteed benefits from current general revenue. That is the system that many European countries use. It is infinitely more equitable both to working people and to small businesses, and it would eliminate the worries and fantasies created by the scare tactics about Social Security and Medicare that are now used as political footballs by Republicans and Democrats alike.

J.W.

Board to Death

By Erica C. Barnett

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Texas' Death Row is not known for mercy. The state's Board of Pardons and Paroles, which authorizes pardons and grants executive clemency, has spared only one Death Row inmate from execution in its history. And although most of the agency's 18 members were appointed by Gov. George W. Bush, he must defer to their decisions in a legal inversion that makes Texas unique among the 38 death-penalty states.

Three months ago, when federal District Judge Sam Sparks called board members to Austin to respond to two Death Row inmates' claims that the board's procedures violated their constitutional rights of due process, Texans got their first glimpse into a system that long had been shrouded in secrecy.

Under this system, Texas has executed 171 inmates—more than any other state—since it resumed capital punishment in 1982. Several cases—like that of Karla Faye Tucker, the first woman executed in Texas in more than a century—have pushed the state into the national spotlight. But none have inspired the board to alter its controversial methods. Without any discussion or deliberation, board members routinely review files of evidence the size and heft of cinder blocks. Once they are satisfied that they have adequately reviewed a case, often after only a few hours, members fax in their clemency recommendations to a central office in Austin, where the vote tallies are compiled. Board members say they have never seen a case that justified a hearing or a factual investigation.

Indeed, board members' testimony indicates that the facts themselves are often irrelevant. Although several board members claimed that simply "skimming" a prisoner's request for clemency constitutes sufficient review, no board member ever has provided an explanation for denying clemency.

Sparks wrote in his opinion that although the board's procedure meets minimal due process standards, it is "extremely poor and certainly minimal." He noted that the existing standards are so weak that virtually anything short of "a flip of a coin" would pass the federal litmus test for constitutionality. Although Sparks admitted in his ruling that he could do nothing to force the board to change its ways, he suggested several "procedural safeguards" that board members should adopt to avoid



171 and counting ...

future legal troubles, like holding hearings and stating reasons for their votes. To date, none of Sparks' suggestions has been implemented.

The case later went from Sparks' courtroom to state district court, where the two inmates claimed the board's procedures violated Texas law. Although state District Judge Scott McCown also ruled that the board's actions were constitutional, he found its members' recalcitrance "troubling." McCown recommended that the state legislature take up the issue in its next session, which is now in progress.

However, it was the legislature that gave the board much of its current power. In 1997, it passed a statute that says board members "are not required to meet as a body to perform the members' duties in clemency matters." Board chairman Victor Rodriguez, a

former police chief from south Texas, believes this provision exempts the agency from Texas' open meetings law, an interpretation that Death Row defense attorneys find ridiculous.

A few changes have been implemented since the rulings to make the system less draconian. Some are so minor they border on the comedic. For one, the board's voting sheets now contain a "comments" line, where members are free to provide explanations for their clemency votes—to date, no board member has done this. Although board members have refused to provide any explanations for their decisions, Rodriguez does volunteer that clemency is "not about guilt or innocence." What it is about seems to be more elusive—

board member Daniel Ray Lang described clemency as a concept too "abstract" to categorize—but its definition appears to exclude evidence of rehabilitation, personal redemption or religious conversion.

Bush stands firmly on the side of the board, and many members of Texas' newly elected Republican government are lined up behind him. But even overwhelming official consensus might not be able to stem the tide of public opinion in favor of opening up the process.

Several conservative newspapers, including the *Dallas Morning News*, have published editorials in favor of overturning the board's exemption from open government standards.

Democratic state Rep. Elliott Naishtat has introduced two pieces of legislation to reform the board. The first would direct the board to hold open hearings when considering clemency petitions and provide explanations for its actions; the second would require board members to consider criteria like social history, mental illness and rehabilitation when making its decisions. But with less than three months remaining in the biennial legislative session, Naishtat will have to talk fast to convince legislators to correct what is, literally, a fatal oversight. ■

Erica C. Barnett is a writer for the Austin Chronicle.

Labor's Crossroads

By David Moberg

MIAMI BEACH, FLA.

The labor movement may not yet have turned the corner toward rejuvenation, but at the AFL-CIO executive council's winter meeting here in February, President John Sweeney was willing to declare that it is "at the corner." If so, it's partly because unions have rediscovered an old lesson: Their strength ultimately depends on educating and mobilizing workers into action.

This isn't a spontaneous process, and even if it's the surest road to growth and power in the long run, it's neither cheap nor easy. It takes strategically visionary leaders, dedicated staff and money. It also requires a change in the culture of the labor movement, including more participatory democracy and a broader social vision.

Labor's new approach has paid off in both organizing and politics. The AFL-CIO claims that unions signed up 475,000 new members last year, reflecting steady growth in organizing success. There was a net gain of only 100,000 members—largely because of losses of manufacturing jobs—and the union share of the labor force slipped to 13.9 percent. But that erosion may be stopped in a few years. The Steelworkers, AFSCME and the Autoworkers have announced major new organizing programs, and unions like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees and the Communications Workers are stepping up already aggressive efforts.

In the dramatic culmination of a decade-long effort, on Feb. 25 the SEIU scored the largest single organizing victory since the heyday of auto industry organizing in the late '30s, when 74,000 home health care aides in Los Angeles County voted by a lopsided margin for union representation. The SEIU, which devotes 47 percent of its national budget to organizing, spent more than \$10 million on the drive. It succeeded, lead

organizer David Rolf insists, not simply because of SEIU tenacity, but because the health care aides made the campaign their own.

Although the SEIU had as many as 40 organizers working on the drive, it relied heavily on home health care workers themselves to contact other aides. Indeed, the workers paid for half the cost of the long drive. The workers had to organize politically to even vote on a union in the first place because they were defined by the state as independent contractors who could not unionize. They worked vigorously for candidates who eventually pushed through legislation to establish a new agency as their formal employer. They also formed a coalition with disability activists, senior-citizen organizations and nonprofit social service providers to turn the organizing campaign into a larger fight for consumer rights and better health care.

The SEIU victory was a huge gamble of time and money that few unions have been willing to make, but the payoff is not just with new dues-payers for the union, likely contractual gains for the aides and improved welfare of homebound elderly and disabled

clients. "This is about the future of the labor movement, about what workforce we represent," Rolf says. "It's also about protecting workers in all health care facilities from low-wage competition. It's about everything the labor movement is supposed to be about."

Unions also have demonstrated once again that grass-roots organizing is politically powerful. Labor's political successes last year—defeating both the California initiative to decimate union political funding in the spring and congressional Republicans in the fall—relied heavily on union members talking to their friends and neighbors.

The more that unions contact their members, the more likely they are to vote for Democrats. Members are more strongly influenced by personal contacts, like receiving a leaflet at work, than by television or direct mail, says AFL-CIO political director Steven Rosenthal. In recent elections, union members have both gone to the polls and voted for Democrats far more than nonunion voters. The difference shows up strikingly with white men: About 63 percent of white males who weren't union members voted Republican last fall, but virtually the same percentage of white union men voted Democratic.

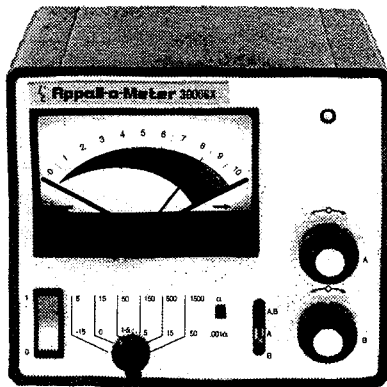
Strategies for future work include not only more grass-roots education and organizing, but also broader alliances with other citizen groups, creating a

Terry LaBan



Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle



Bad Vibrations 7.6

An Alabama law passed last year makes it illegal to sell vibrators in the state. Now a group of women, with the help of the ACLU, has sued the state to reclaim the right to vibrate. "It's a \$10,000 fine and a year of hard labor if you get caught selling vibrators," Sherri Williams, owner of Loving Enterprises Inc., which sells chocolates, lingerie and other kinds of romance-enhancers, told Reuters. "They set out to eliminate strip clubs, but along the way they snuck in sex toys. Not only did they take away your entertainment, but when they were done they also took away your right to entertain yourself."

Disposable Income 5.2

Customers of Palm Beach's upper-crust clothing store Maus & Hoffman can now impress their friends, if not with expensive gifts, with possibly even more expensive wrapping paper made up of uncut sheets of \$1 and \$2 bills. The cost? \$110 for a sheet of twos; half that for ones. Uncut sheets of bills have been sold to collectors for years, but this may be the first time they've ever been used in place of plain old wrapping paper. "So many of our customers are older and they have everything, and they're so hard to buy for," store employee Michelle Kielb told The Associated Press. "It's a nice way to get something extra." We hear \$100 dollar bills are also great for lighting cigars.

Pot Shots 8.3

At first glance, the pamphlet "How Parents Can Help Children Live Marijuana Free," prepared by a Utah criminology professor and sporting a

preface from Sen. Orrin Hatch, looks like just another addition to the already gigantic pile of war-on-drugs propaganda. But, as the *Washington Post* points out, the pamphlet contains a very interesting list of "Social Signs of Regular Users" for parents to tell if their kids are potheads.

Be wary, the pamphlet says, not only if your child starts staying out all hours of the night and suddenly demanding money—but if he or she develops an "excessive preoccupation with social causes, race relations, environmental issues, etc." *In These Times* subscribers, presumably, are all on crack.



TERRY LABAN

popular political force that is independent of Democratic Party leaders. At the Miami Beach meeting, the AFL-CIO executive council allocated \$40 million for politics over the next two-year election cycle, getting a much earlier jump than usual. That money will not go to candidates but to educational programs, though obviously with electoral ends in mind. Some money will be used to build grass-roots political machinery that will work at election time and beyond.

There are obstacles to the strategy of rebuilding labor by mobilizing members and broadening the movement's vision. It's something many labor leaders haven't done and even fear politically. It can threaten corrupt and undemocratic leaders (still a problem even in progressive unions, as

clean-up efforts underway in big AFSCME and SEIU locals in New York demonstrate).

Also, unions must decide whether a consistent, long-term alliance with citizen groups will take precedence over alliances of convenience with a business establishment that remains resolutely anti-union. After Sweeney addressed a U.S. Chamber of Commerce meeting last November in Washington, the AFL-CIO invited Chamber President Thomas Donahue to Florida. Although both groups have urged Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan to lower interest rates, in most cases there is no common ground. But Donahue's bid for labor to join business in fighting protection against global warming threatens an important relationship that labor and environ-

mentalists have been building, especially in fighting global economic deals.

Rather than compromise its own corporate critique by allying with the Chamber of Commerce, unions would be better served by developing alternatives to the corporate view, whether it's for taming globalization, providing universal health care or protecting the environment. Similarly, labor needs to find a better way of expressing its aspirations for independence from Democrats than simply endorsing more Republicans.

Despite these stumbling blocks, there are signs that the labor movement is at a corner—and debating which way or how fast to turn. The more union members themselves participate in the debate, the richer it will be. ■

The Anti-Feminists Money Can Buy

To keep feminist commentators off TV, producers have excuses that run the gamut. You're too close to the story to be a good source, they say. Or too far from it. The story's not news or it's old news. You sound predictable. Or too wild. You don't represent a sufficiently large constituency. Or else, we're looking for a less widely held view. Of course these arguments don't apply to women of the right. With all that conservative bombast and blonde hair blowing, it's hard to tell those perky pundits apart.

Commentator Laura Ingraham now hosts her own program, *Watch It*, on MSNBC. Ingraham went from the *Dartmouth Review* (and a romance with its editor Dinesh D'Souza), to the Reagan White House, to working for Clarence Thomas at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 1992, she set up an ad hoc grouplet, Women for Thomas, during his Supreme Court nomination hearings. Though tiny in number, Ingraham's gang posed as opposite and equal to the massive support that women were giving Anita Hill—and the media treated them just that way. Now Ingraham is so wrong, so often, it's laughable. This past November, for example, the media earnestly listened as she predicted the GOP would gain 13 House seats on election day. No matter. Being a perky pundit apparently doesn't require getting things right.

Then there's Ann Coulter. She's not just wild, she's scary. On *Rivera Live* last fall, she said, "Clinton would use taxpayer-funded jobs to pay off his little government-funded brothel." On CNN's *Equal Time* she reasoned that it was time for Americans to ask "whether the president is insane." As for having a healthy remove from the story, Coulter (a leading light in the Federalist Society) is not just close to the Starr scandal—on which she regularly comments—she actually played a decisive role, suggesting to Linda Tripp that she take her tapes to the independent counsel's office. On a recent bout of *Crossfire*, it came out that Coulter had heard one of

Tripp's recordings before the story went public. An unidentified "friend" needed Coulter's recording equipment to make a dub (which happens to be illegal under Maryland law).

In print, where one irregular column by Barbara Ehrenreich was apparently



too much for *Time* magazine, the papers of record are packed with the punditry of conservative women. Cathy Young of the right-wing, libertarian *Reason* appears weekly in papers from Philadelphia to Detroit. Others who've published opinion pieces in just the first months of 1999 include Christina Hoff Summers, who attacked sexual-harass-

Ingraham's Women for Thomas—and the libertarian Women's Freedom Network, not to mention right-wing institutes like Manhattan and American Enterprise. IWF was founded with \$100,000 in start-up funds from Richard Scaife's Carthage Foundation. Milwaukee's Bradley Foundation contributed \$40,000 for an IWF directory of conservative women that was distributed free to the media. Ingraham, Young, Crittenden, Thernstrom and Furchtgott-Roth were all in it. Soon thereafter, their profiles soared.

Lately, conservative foundations have been particularly generous toward women pundits who oppose affirmative action, banking on the idea that women voters can be swayed against desegregation policies most effectively by other women. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* recently reported that Thernstrom received \$100,000 from conservative foundations to write, with her husband, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*—their anti-affirmative action

The papers of record are packed with the punditry of conservative women. No wonder feminists get glum.

ment laws in schools, and Danielle Crittenden, whose new book blames the women's movement for messing up motherhood. Diana Furchtgott-Roth of the American Enterprise Institute and Abigail Thernstrom of the Manhattan Institute have been out there too.

No wonder feminists get glum. They blame themselves for not winning the public relations game. But media popularity is not necessarily a product of super-acuity. Or even cute-ity. (Not all those chicks are babes.) The right has some substantial help. A handful of ideologically driven funders underwriting these women's careers. Hours of research, then more of professional media training, have been bought and paid for on their behalf.

Dollars funnel into the trough through organizations like the Independent Women's Forum (IWF)—a spin-off from

diatribe. In 1997, the Olin Foundation contributed another \$180,000 to promote the book. No wonder Thernstrom's name turns up hundreds of hits on the Lexis-Nexis database.

Watch out for a similar blitz on women and economics from Diana Furchtgott-Roth. Along with Christine Stolba, Roth received a grant of \$50,000 from Olin in 1997 for a book on affirmative action and women. In February, the pair co-published a piece in the *Wall Street Journal* attacking "comparable worth." More of this is on the way.

Feminists need to call those double-standard media managers to account—then speak their minds. And, if you're looking for comfort, consider this: Money-conscious people like the folks at Olin and Bradley don't tend to pay out hand over fist for fights they're confident they'll win. ■

Monica: Weighing In

Searching for some edifying lesson to draw from Monica-gate, I turned to Andrew Morton's *Monica's Story*—where I discovered that the whole thing was really about food. Cookies are mentioned; pizza is no doubt implicated; and one wonders how many pastries got washed down with her skimmed and artificially sweetened lattes. The food items themselves don't rate much attention, but hardly a page goes by without some reference to their effects one way or another: "She was beginning to get a little overweight," "she was slimmer than she had ever been," "her weight had become an overriding concern." To Morton, it is her weight that torpedoed her self-esteem early in life, driving her into the arms of married, emotionally abusive cads. If Monica had been a size 8, he would have us believe, you could drop the "gate" from her name.

So what is a biographer to do with a woman who has been reviled and caricatured by the worldwide media for more than a year? He's going to tell her story as a saga of food-related victimhood, of course. In *Diana: Her True Story*, he had the princess overeating because she was deprived of love. In *Monica's Story*, the heroine loves too much because she overeats. Food is love in the world of Morton's women. "One thing about food for me is that it's very reliable," Monica says in the book. "You always know what your favorite cookie is going to taste like. ... There's a security about it." (Appropriately, some of the many apt commercials interrupting Barbara Walters' interview with Monica were for diet aides; another, for Burger King, ended with the words "So stop crying and start eating.")

You might conclude, then, that the "nightmare" of impeachment was simply the price we have to pay for being such a weirdly fat-hating and food-obsessed culture. Maybe Monica would have turned out very different in the heftier environment of, say, Iowa. But as one of her friends observes, Beverly Hills, where Monica grew up, "is very unkind to heavy people." In grade school, she was

known as "Big Mac," and as Morton sees it, those extra pounds made her see herself as perpetually "second best in her relations with men."

Bill "I feel your pain" Clinton probably didn't help any with compliments like "I saw you in the hall today. You



looked really skinny." Though Morton doesn't quite say it, there seems to be some sort of conspiracy at work here: Tell women over and over that they are, or might easily become, too fat, too old, too ugly, and they'll be grateful for whatever crumbs of male attention fall their way.

She refers comfortably and repeatedly to her "sensuality," as if the pinched and relentlessly censorious Walters might have had any idea what she was talking about.

So it was a big surprise to everyone when—far from being a thumb-sucking victim of lethally low self-esteem—Monica came across on 20/20 as the kind of woman a president, or even a Republican House manager, might understandably fall for: bright, funny, radiantly attractive. By comparison, most of the other high-profile Democratic players in the scandal look neurotic and tic-ridden: Hillary with her rhythmic head-nodding, David Kendall with his permanent squint, Sidney Blumenthal and his metronomic blink. As for the president, he emerges in *Monica's Story* as a callow, indecisive, self-pitying wretch who counters her demands for attention with complaints about his back pain, his knee pain, and—violins, please!—"the pain and torment that having an

extramarital affair gave him as a married man." In a scandal featuring so many betrayers and evaders, self-righteous puritans and equally self-righteous liars, Monica may be the only actual mensch.

The real Monica brims with a good-natured self-confidence that even Morton can't entirely conceal. "I do have a certain level of expectation about what I deserve," Monica tells him. "Both from the way in which I was brought up, and the environment in which I was brought up." If this isn't self-esteem—bordering on a rich kid's obnoxious sense of entitlement—what is? Maybe she went for older, married men not because she thought so little of herself, but because she believed she was their equal.

Clearly, the fabled self-doubts about her size do not extend to her sexual appeal. In the ABC interview, she refers comfortably and repeatedly to her "sensuality," as if the pinched and relentlessly censorious Walters might

have had any idea what she was talking about. And what kind of woman would lift the back of her jacket to a near-stranger, the better to expose her underpants?

At one point toward the end of the book, Morton acknowledges that the real key to Monica may be her sexuality rather than her girth. "Clinton the adulterer and liar is a forgiven man," he observes. "Monica Lewinsky the temptress is a scorned woman, derided by feminists and conservatives alike ... for her to be female, young, confident, well-groomed, at ease with her sexuality ... constitutes some sort of crime." So here's the lesson of *Monica's Story*: While it's still considered perfectly natural for a man to stray, the sexually adventurous woman better have a good alibi, like "My dress size made me do it." ■

Lost Illusions

Vladimir Tismaneanu

A decade has passed since the extraordinary events that led to the collapse of the Leninist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe. That decade has been filled with high expectations and noble dreams of justice and freedom, as well as with frustration and painful disappointment. Free and fair elections took place in all these countries, but the results have not necessarily consolidated full-fledged, pluralist systems. Some countries have initiated and instituted viable democratic practices and institutions. Others have lagged behind and remain quasi-democracies with little prospect of being accepted into the much-coveted, often-idealized Western club. In more than one case, "velvet revolutions" were followed by "velvet restorations."

On the positive side, popular sovereignty has replaced the rule of the self-appointed "proletarian vanguards" and ideological monism has vanished. Still imperfect to be sure, the rule of law is intertwined with the everyday life of these societies. While the democratic forms and rhetoric are definitely there, the substance of democratic values and genuine development of a political culture based on trust and tolerance remain in question. After all, freedom is also freedom for forces inimical to democracy.

The post-communist landscape remains haunted by pre-modern ideological specters—tribal collectivism, clericalism and ethnocentric populism. Cynicism and contempt for intellectuals are rampant. Although historical memory is incessantly invoked in public debates, narratives of self-pity and self-glorification prevail over lucid scrutiny of the past. The early exaltation of liberal values was followed by the rise of all sorts of collectivist mythologies and frequent outbursts of xenophobic intolerance. And the long-acclaimed privatization too often has been used as a smoke screen by new (or not so new) elites to plunder existing resources and establish personal economic hegemony (primarily, but not exclusively, in collusion with foreign capital).

The justified yearning to come to terms with the communist and pre-communist past often has derailed into blatant demagoguery and new forms of historical Manicheism. In other words, the post-communist arena is one of uncertainty, confusion and ongoing struggle between democrats and anti-pluralist forces. There is no need to lament this state of affairs. The end of illusions is a normal post-revolutionary situation. Historically, after a major social convulsion, feelings of betrayal and despondency replace euphoria and joy. As political sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf wisely has noted: "The revolution of 1989, like other revolutions before it, has succeeded in removing an old regime which will not return. The revolution of 1989, like other revolutions before it, was bound to disappoint those who entered it with extravagant hopes for a new world of unconstrained discourse, equality and fundamental democracy. ... Countries may overcome the obstacles,

but the plain fact remains that revolutions are not simply very helpful when it comes to the constitution of liberty."

Based on Eastern Europe's experience, scholars have suggested at least two models of transition from Leninist authoritarianism to "an open society." This is not to say that post-communism is necessarily a failure in some countries and an unmitigated success story in others. No transition has been completely smooth, but differences in terms of the speed and the scope of democratization cannot be ignored. Whatever the tribulations of transition in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, there is little doubt that these countries have gone a long way in terms of democratic institutionalization, creating a relatively predictable party system and preserving a widespread constitutional consensus against onslaughts from the radical extremes (both left and right). Democratic procedure



MICHAEL DAUGAARD/2 MA/IMPACT VISUALS

is widely accepted as the only game in town. On the other hand, the case of Romania—where several thousand angry miners marched toward Bucharest in January, creating a sense of universal panic—suggests how highly vulnerable the democratic order remains in some parts of the former Soviet bloc.

There is a widespread temptation among scholars and journalists to use presumed civilizing fault lines to explain the different models of dismantling Leninism (political roundtables versus plebeian violence). Thus, East-Central Europe, with its Hapsburgian legacies of the rule of law and Western-style institutions, is often opposed to Southeast Europe, essentialized in the blanket, often derogatory term, “the Balkans.” Whatever the narrowness of this condescending framework, it is hard to deny that democratic traditions matter, and therefore the democratic values and institutions are more vulnerable and beleaguered in societies where ethno-nationalism historically has been a “political religion” (Albania, Croatia, Romania, Serbia). As the century ends, it is worthwhile to highlight the basic cultural and moral dilemmas of these societies. The possibility of a democratic breakdown and the rise of Peronista-style movements should figure as prominently on the U.S. foreign policy agenda as the effort to build open societies.

Leninist legacies cannot simply be wished away. They are part and parcel of the existential experience of individuals, groups and classes within these societies, determining memories, affinities, loyalties and identities. Even diehard

The revolutions of 1989 replaced a closed universe with an open political and economic space. A new world emerged, where the individual encounters maddening choices, daunting risks and unbearable prospects for failure. Was it worth it?

anti-communists define their past and present in opposition to Leninist practices and mentalities. Righting the wrongs of the past has turned out to be a very difficult endeavor, especially because the divide between victims and perpetrators was so elusive during the last stage of communist regimes. The most adamant proponents of lustration laws against former apparatchiks often used apocalyptic rhetorical arguments strangely reminiscent of the violent calls for social purification from fanatic Stalinists in the early '50s. On the other hand, opposition to any form of de-communization has led to neglect of past ignominies and the perpetuation of the old nomenclature's hold on significant political and economic power. The disturbing question thus remains, 10 years after the breakdown of Leninism: Is the revolution over?

First, we must ask, to what extent were the events of 1989 genuine revolutions? Did they represent a return to the pre-communist stage (a “restoration” of sorts, as Jurgen Habermas once argued) or rather did they inaugurate a truly new phase in the evolution of those societies? While it is certainly true that the revolutions included anti-modern, anarcho-populist elements, one still needs to recognize that the first post-communist stage was intellectually dominated by

the vision of an emancipated polis and vibrant civil society. These ideals, spelled out by thinkers like Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik or Jacek Kuron, did not vanish without a trace. Whatever the ugly features of post-communism, including consumerism, mercantilism, chauvinism, and contempt for values of fraternity, civic solidarity and compassion, one should not gloss over the ongoing struggle in the region. The yearning for civil society, the aspiration to construct a public space in which unencumbered citizens can debate the vital questions of their community, remains an unfinished part of the revolutionary project of 1989.

Revisiting the first post-communist decade provides us an opportunity to confront our illusions regarding the revolutions and transitions. With the benefit of hindsight we can say today that the mystique of the market (British historian Timothy Garton Ash once called it the latest Central European utopia) and the celebration of party politics made many of us oblivious to the economic, moral and psychological predicaments of so many within these societies.

The conventional wisdom that needs to be challenged, is the idea that once the Leninist pyramids of lies and repression were dismantled, these countries would enter a democratic paradise. The “end of history” school associated with Francis Fukuyama turned this ideological shibboleth into an article of faith, announcing that democratic liberalism has triumphed. To paraphrase a line from Marx's *Capital*: “There was a history before then, not after.” Looking into Russia's prolonged, post-Leninist agony and considering the dismal fate of Yugoslavia, we need to be more cautious when engaging in such grandiose, historio-philosophical speculations.

In the avalanche of books and studies on these events, there are two major schools of interpretation. First, the optimists insist on the depth of the democratic consolidation and the weakness of illiberal, nationalist movements. After all, they say, Poland is a great success story and, as in the past, it plays a pioneering role for transitions in the whole region. The pessimists focus primarily (but not exclusively) on the more problematic southern cases and sound more skeptical. Altogether, however, nobody denies the basic fact that the revolutions of 1989 replaced a closed universe with an open political and economic space. A world in which the future was pre-determined and the Communist Party was granted the privilege of epistemic infallibility fell apart. A new one emerged, where the individual encounters maddening choices, daunting risks and unbearable prospects for failure. The empty idealism of communism was replaced, some would argue, by the crass materialism of naked selfish interest or, more ominously, by ethnocentric nationalism. Was it worth all the fights and hopes?

The simple fact that such questions are now vividly debated in all these societies is the strongest argument for a positive assessment of the events of 1989. Whatever the nasty features of what Havel called “the post-communist nightmare,” one thing is certain: The times of regimented unanimity and forced acceptance of the officially ascribed concept of human happiness are over. ■

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The Death of Dreams

By Fred Weir
Moscow

A forced march to nowhere" is how young liberal Russians used to describe their country's long and brutal experiment in state socialism. No one expected such despair nearly a decade down the post-Soviet road to a market-driven society, but here it is: "Every single politician is dirty, every good slogan just a lie. Everything that pretends to be a political process in Russia is just arrangements between gangster clans, the better to rob the rest of us."

This is not one of those media stereotypes—the "embittered Communist hard-liner"—talking. Pavel Vorontsov is a 42-year-old unemployed financial analyst, who just a year ago believed he was well on his way to joining the global middle-class. He had a job with a leading bank, drove a Toyota Corolla, vacationed with his wife in the Canary Islands and sent his 10-year-old son, Dima, to a Moscow private school. For Vorontsov, the bottom dropped out last September, after the Russian government defaulted on its domestic debts, the banking system collapsed and the ruble began a dive that has erased almost three-quarters of its value. "I came into work one day and there was an e-mail message telling me to leave," he says. "Looking around, I can now see it wasn't just the loss of a job but the death of my dreams."

Last summer's financial implosion was so sweeping, its long-term impact so dire, that most experts are now willing to pronounce dead Russia's seven-year, heroic—if largely fictitious—transition to democracy and market economics. It is ending in much the same chaos and confusion as it began—minus the element of hope. "The country has been changed irrevocably, but clear across the spectrum the results of reforms are viewed as a failure," says Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the independent Institute for Strategic Studies in Moscow. "Even the people who led the market reforms are saying today that we built bandit capitalism in Russia. No one has any idea where we go from here."

What Vorontsov took for the advent of Western-style, middle-class capitalism was always pretty much a downtown Moscow phenomenon, and it now has been exposed as a giant financial pyramid that was kept standing by a constant influx of cash from Western investors and the International Monetary Fund. "In the early years of reform, the government funded its operations by printing money and swallowing the resulting inflation. And the banks grew fat by speculating against the inflation rate," says Sergei Tarasenko, an analyst with the independent Fund for Realism in Politics. "Then around 1995, on Western advice, they switched to financing the government deficit by accumulating debt.

Interest rates skyrocketed and the banks grew fatter by buying state securities. Then it all collapsed into the quicksand it was built on. And Russia is back to square one."

For Russia's tiny but immensely wealthy elite, and a handful of middle-class professionals like Vorontsov, the government's virtual declaration of bankruptcy last August seemed like a brick wall blocking the highway to prosperity. For most Russians, however, hope died much earlier. They have endured what may well be the longest and deepest economic depression of the 20th century and certainly have seen the harshest privations since World War II. "I don't need much, I can almost live on bread and tea," says Faina Borovaya, a 77-year-old retired teacher who survives on her pension of 500 rubles (about \$25) a month.

Borovaya owns her one-room Soviet-era flat, for which she hasn't paid municipal maintenance or utilities fees in years. Tens of millions across Russia are in a similar position and, despite threats, no one has worked up the nerve to take action against

them. "I don't feel sorry for myself," Borovaya says. "But when I see how little there is for children today, I want to cry. The schools are falling apart, teachers aren't getting their salaries. Even in the worst days of the war, this country prepared its children for the future. Now, it's as though no one cares if there is a future."

More than 300,000 Russian teachers staged angry wildcat strikes in January, blocking railroads and besieging local administration buildings, to demand wages that are six months or more in arrears. Most public sector



Maria Terasevich, 25, Russia's first *Playboy* playmate, stands next to Anna Soboleva, a 75-year-old World War II veteran, who is holding a portrait of Stalin.

HEIDI HOLLINGER

workers, doctors, coal miners and millions of employees in nominally privatized industries are suffering a similar plight. Russians manage without cash in ways that defy the Western imagination—growing their own food, bartering and sharing within extended families—but social breakdown is looming. There has been virtually no investment in basic infrastructure for more than a decade. The central heating plants, generating stations, roads, housing stock, sanitation systems and hospitals across the country are literally crumbling. Reports from Russia's far north, where 12 million people live—the human legacy of Soviet economic planning—speak of creeping hunger and desperation. “In the Arctic and the Russian Pacific territories the life support systems are beginning to fail this winter,” says Vilen Perlamotrov, an analyst with the Institute of Market Problems in Moscow. “It's a real warning for the whole country.”

The government of Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, which came in on the heels of financial collapse, has imposed an eerie political calm but done little else. Its most visible achievement has been a mass advertising campaign urging beleaguered Russians to pay their taxes. The streets of Moscow, and the metro stations through which millions of huddled commuters stream every day, are blanketed with red, blue and white billboards that bear an image of the Russian flag and the slogan: “No one will help Russia but we ourselves.”

Few expect Primakov's peace to last. President Boris Yeltsin, looking sicker by the day, seems only capable of rage. Last year, he fired two prime ministers and very nearly shattered the con-

Phillipov, deputy director of the party's international department. “It means all the property of the nation will be stolen by a corrupt few, all the obligations of the nation to its people will be betrayed and the nation itself will be sold to outside powers.”

The liberals who led the reforms are in a probably terminal eclipse. But even on their way down, they cannot find much common ground on what went wrong. Many blame Yeltsin for his continual vacillations, others stress insufficient support from the West, and most seem to think everything would still be under control if it weren't for the global financial crisis ignited by Asia in 1997. Some are still insisting the problem is communism. Pyotr Aven, a trade minister in an early Yeltsin cabinet who became a prominent banker, recently wrote an influential article in the *Kommersant Daily*, a liberal, business-oriented Moscow newspaper, arguing there never were any market reforms in Russia. “We never had liberal economics and we do not have them now,” Aven wrote. “Russia suffers not from capitalism, but from the lack of it.”

Boris Kagarlitsky, one of the country's few socialist scholars, says that Russia is indeed suffering from capitalism, although not the Western version. “It's ridiculous to think Russia could build an American-style system in a few years, or ever,” he says. “What we got is a version of peripheral capitalism, in which all the driving forces are from the outside. Instead of gradually accumulating capital and building up national industry, as America did, Russia has been disaccumulating capital. Our economy will only begin to grow if it can delink itself from the West.”

Recent studies have put capital flight from Russia at almost \$200 billion since 1992—around \$2 billion per month. “It would not be so bad if our economy were just dominated by a handful of oligarchs who ran the country like a fiefdom,” Piontkovsky says. “But the entire elite has acted in the same parasitic way for years. From the smallest factory directors to the biggest oligarchs, they privatized state resources and channeled them for their own use.”

On Feb. 1, Russia's chief public prosecutor, Yuri Skuratov, sent a letter to parliament charging that a tiny, unknown firm based in the British tax-free island of Jersey had been handed \$50 billion of Russia's hard currency reserves to invest over a period of five years. This shell company, called FIMACO, apparently was created by directors of Russia's Central Bank and was paid undisclosed sums for managing the public's money, a task that belongs to the central bank itself in most countries. The day after sending that letter, Skuratov was fired by Yeltsin and disappeared from sight. In various elliptical statements on the issue since, Central Bank officials have admitted to the main outlines of the charges but refused to give details. “The Soviet Union collapsed because it was economically ineffective,” Piontkovsky says. “But what happened was that the Soviet bureaucracy essentially privatized itself. Now we have something even worse than the Soviet bureaucracy: a class that owns everything but feels no responsibility to produce anything.”

Kagarlitsky argues the perverted form of Russian capitalism was dictated as much by the demands of the outside world as by the short-term greed and anti-social nature of the former Communist elite. “We became part of the global system of capitalism, and this was how our elite found they could fit into it,” he says. “It's incredible that Western leaders now affect shock over the corruption and dysfunctional economics that took root in Russia. After all, just a little while ago the Russian elite who did all this were hailed as heroes of reform and warriors of democracy in the West. Where did all our money go? Don't look for it in Russia.” ■

“Everything they said about communism was false, but everything they told us about capitalism was true.”

stitutional system that he created after violently dispersing the Parliament in 1993. Primakov, a compromise candidate appointed in September to patch things up, has taken over the ailing and frequently hospitalized Yeltsin's state duties—exactly the sort of thing known to provoke presidential fury. Assuming Yeltsin doesn't suddenly destabilize the system by attempting to cut Primakov down, or trigger a succession crisis by dying, Russia still faces onrushing parliamentary elections at the end of this year, and a presidential contest just a few months later. “Even if the economy were running smoothly we'd be in for a very hot political year,” says Vladimir Petukhov, an analyst with the conservative Institute of Social and National Problems in Moscow. “But here we are skirting the abyss of social explosion, and the political elite are moving into an all-out struggle for power.”

If everyone agrees the outlook is bleak, there is little accord on how Russia got into this mess. Most blame Western capitalism, logically enough, since that's what the Kremlin equated reforms with for seven years. And Yeltsin has been seen kowtowing to the IMF, the World Bank and every Western leader who swung through Moscow. The popular mood is captured by a joke making the rounds, a surprisingly gentle dig at the country's former Soviet leaders: “Everything they said about communism was false, but everything they told us about capitalism was true.”

The Communist Party, still Russia's largest political group, seems pathetically incapable of rising to this opportunity with coherent policies, but does score the obvious rhetorical points. “We can now say we know what capitalism is,” says Andrei

Czech Scams

By **Tony Weslowsky**
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

Nowhere was there more hope after the fall of communism than in Czechoslovakia. Led by dissident playwright Vaclav Havel, the Czechs and Slovaks avoided chaos as their "Velvet Revolution" peacefully brought an end to more than 40 years of hardline Communist rule.

In November 1989, flanked by Alexander Dubcek, the Slovak Communist Party leader whose attempts to create "socialism with a human face" led to the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, Havel addressed throngs of his countrymen gathered in Prague's Wenceslaus Square and called for the rebirth of civil society. The crowd responded by clanging keys and shouting "Havel to the Castle." Shortly thereafter, Havel, who had languished in jails under the Communists, found himself ensconced in the gothic castle overlooking picturesque Prague as Czechoslovakia's new—though mostly ceremonial—president.

Less celebrated but more significant to the future of the Czech Republic, however, was the emergence of Vaclav Klaus, a classic neoliberal, who rose to finance minister and eventually prime minister in 1992. Klaus set out to create a "market economy without adjectives," and his initial efforts seemed promising. The Czech economy took off, especially after its poor relation Slovakia, saddled with much of the country's outdated heavy industry, was jettisoned in the peaceful split of Jan. 1, 1993. Through a combination of tight monetary policy and good fortune, the Czech Republic was hailed in the West, along with Hungary and Poland, as one of the few successes in Eastern Europe.

But as the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall approaches, many Czechs are finding less to celebrate. Unemployment is over 8 percent and is expected to reach 12 to 13 percent by the end of the year (just four years ago it was as low as 3 percent). A wave of bankruptcies is expected soon among companies on shaky financial footing; banks, saddled with millions of dollars in bad loans, also could collapse. The economy is stagnant at best, with analysts predicting no more than 1 percent growth this year. Klaus' star has fallen: He and his coalition government were ousted in 1997. Czech disillusionment has reached as far as his chief rival, the once-lionized Havel. For the first time ever, a recent opinion poll found a majority of Czechs calling for the father of the Velvet Revolution to step down amid concerns about his frail health.

Meanwhile, news filters out of scandals and corruption surrounding the country's early '90s privatization drive, which current Prime Minister Milos Zeman bluntly calls "the swindle of the century." In 1991, Klaus launched an ambitious plan to hand over 1,500 former state companies valued at some \$13 billion to Czechoslovakian citizens in the form of coupons

redeemable for small stock packets. Some 600 investment funds sprouted like spores to "help" citizens, uninitiated in the ways of the market, to invest their vouchers.

One of the most noteworthy funds was established by a then 27-year-old Harvard graduate, Viktor Kozeny. In a media blitz, Kozeny promised his wary fellow countrymen 1,000 percent returns within "a year and a day" if they signed their vouchers over to his Harvard Group investment fund. Many did, and Kozeny soon became the holder of a significant portion of the country's industrial stock. But Kozeny's fund turned out to be a fraud; it functioned like a ponzi scheme, soaring in value initially as the money poured in from investors. He skimmed off at least \$30 million of the fund's assets to cover dubious "fees." He fled the Czech Republic in 1994, faced with bizarre charges of buying state secrets.

Kozeny ended up in the Bahamas, where he hooked up with a notorious American investor, Michael Dingman, who was eager to play the Czech market. The duo set out to snatch up eight



Happier days: President Vaclav Havel, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Prime Minister Milos Zeman and former Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus discuss Czech admission to NATO in 1997.

viable Czech companies, but, lacking cash, Kozeny apparently dipped into his fund's reserves. He then converted the fund into a holding company, which merged with Dingman's investment operations to form yet another company, Daventree Ltd. (Some of the luminaries on the board of Cyprus-based Daventree, according to *Fortune*, include former White House chief of staff John Sununu and former astronaut Thomas P. Stafford.)

Left in the wake of all the wheeling and dealing, the original Czech investors watched the fund plummet in value as Kozeny

STANISLAV PESKA/AFP

and Dingman siphoned off millions. Investors ripped off by the scheme had little recourse. No security commission then existed to regulate the funds. Unlike Poland and Hungary, the Czech Republic had no commercial courts nor legislation to regulate business activities. In his zeal to privatize, Klaus failed to set up any rules for the game, spawning more freewheeling than free markets. Tomas Jezek, a former privatization minister and head of the new Securities Commission, told the English weekly *Prague Post* that the coupon privatization deal set the country back five years by forestalling the influx of much-needed foreign capital.

Although the most notorious, Kozeny and Dingman were far from the only schemers in the Czech capital markets. Other investment fund managers took part in legal embezzlement that became known in the Czech Republic as "tunneling." Holding huge shares in various firms, investment funds quickly learned there was nothing legally barring them from transferring a company's assets wherever they pleased. Fund managers gambled with the funds' cash as if it were their own, says Josef Poeschl, an economist at the Vienna Institute for Comparative Economic Studies. Brokering a sweetheart stock deal could earn a fund manager a little stock on the side, a plum job or even co-ownership in a company. Investors in these bogus funds suffered heavy losses.

Seventy percent of all former state assets are now in the hands of investment funds, according to a 1995 study of the Czech economy by Zees Zijlstra, a member of the Dutch Labor

Czech disillusionment has even reached as far as the once-lionized Vaclav Havel.

Party. Zijlstra found that 80 percent of those shares are owned by a mere four investment firms. Three of these firms are owned by former state banks, which in turn are either controlled or heavily influenced by the government. In other words, most privatized enterprises are owned by funds owned by banks owned by the state.

This financial *ménage à trois* postponed crucial economic restructuring, Poeschl says. Loss-making industries built up huge debt because banks were willing to supply easy credit, fearing if they didn't the industries would go bankrupt and default on their earlier loans. In turn, corrupt industrial managers, holdovers from the communist days, used the easy credit to set up other business interests. Since the investment funds were controlled by the banks, they failed to demand the needed restructuring.

The result: enormous debt. Czech firms currently owe Czech banks and one another some \$6 billion. Guenther Faschang of Die Erste Bank told the Czech daily *Lidove Noviny* late last year that about 30 percent of all outstanding loans in the Czech Republic are unrecoverable. In 1997, the Czech National Bank (CNB) introduced regulations making it tougher for commercial banks to continue their funding of loss-making companies. As a result, a wave of bankruptcies is expected this year.

In the biggest default so far, the huge petrochemical firm Chemapol was ruled bankrupt in late January. Chemapol, which employs 15,000 people through its subsidiaries, had outstanding loans worth \$172 million. One analyst has called Chemapol nothing more than a shell company. Its president, Vaclav Junek, a close friend of Klaus, has been accused of

being more interested in building a large business empire than in sound business. Former Interior Minister Jan Ruml says Junek worked for the Communist secret police, the StB, in the '80s. And Chemapol reportedly has ties to the Russian Mafia via the company's oil-importing operation. Befitting this image, five officials linked to Chemapol have died under murky circumstances.

Klaus turned a blind eye to much of the dirty dealing. His Civic Democratic Party (ODS) coalition government crashed in December 1997 following a scandal involving \$200,000 in donations to his party that were falsely attributed to a dead Hungarian and a penniless Mauritian. It was later revealed the money likely came from a Czech businessman interested in the privatization of state-owned steel works. The scandal was the most damaging but far from the only one to haunt the Klaus government. That same year, allegations also surfaced that Westinghouse had bribed the Klaus government to win two contracts at the Czech nuclear power plant at Temelin. Then, earlier this year, Dutch television reported that the Dutch telecommunications company TelSource had paid bribes to Klaus' government in 1995 to secure a 27 percent stake in the Czech telecom company SPT. Ruml said that members of the then ruling ODS coalition government accepted between \$80 and \$100 million in "gifts" for the telecom deal, which some are calling the biggest bribery scandal in the country's short history. Officials of the Dutch company openly admitted to the bribes, saying they're all part of doing business in Eastern Europe. The Dutch parliament has called for a full investigation of the deal.

Klaus, the quintessential politician, is already mounting a comeback even though thousands of rank-and-file ODS members defected from the party after the 1997 government collapse to join a new right-wing party led by Ruml. But Klaus, who remained as ODS leader, secured a key role for the party in the current Social Democrat-led government when the supposedly bitter political foes forged a Faustian pact following parliamentary elections last summer, in which the Social Democrats emerged with a slight victory. Because ODS abstained from the vote, the Social Democrats were able to form a minority government and win parliamentary approval. In return, ODS gained the chairmanship of the lower house of parliament. However, the arrangement has given the Social Democrats little room to maneuver in Parliament, creating political gridlock.

To the delight of ODS party officials, an attempt by the Social Democrats to root out corruption, called "Clean Hands," came to nothing. (In all fairness, the Social Democrats have been stung by corruption too, including a party slush fund in Switzerland.) The much-ballyhooed anti-corruption campaign has been one of the Social Democrats' few policy initiatives. The party has seemed unprepared to take the reins of government. With patience running out, the Social Democrats have unveiled plans to revitalize some industries, but their program has been met with skepticism by the opposition and an increasingly hostile press.

Czech pundits are now asking not if, but when, the fragile Social Democrat government will collapse. The name mentioned most to lead the next government? Vaclav Klaus. ■

Tony Weslowsky is a journalist covering Eastern Europe. He is based in Prague.

Kosovo's Slippery Slope

By George Kenney

In February, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright showed up at the Rambouillet Peace Conference wearing her trademark black cowboy hat and duster. She raised hell, threatening the Serbs with NATO bombing if they didn't sign a deal giving substantial autonomy to the Albanian majority in Kosovo. To back up her threat, more than 400 warplanes, including B-52 bombers, were put on alert and U.S. diplomats were evacuated from Belgrade. But after 17 days of marathon negotiations, neither the Serbs nor, to the stupefaction of American diplomats, the Albanians would sign the agreement. The Serbs were off the hook. Albright returned empty-handed, scheduling follow-up talks for late March designed to finally clinch the deal.

The United States has had trouble devising a workable plan for Kosovo, and there has been no innovative thinking from those outside the government about the region since the 1995 Dayton Accords that brought NATO peacekeepers to Bosnia. But since the Serbs and Kosovars clearly cannot resolve their differences on their own, the United States and NATO agree something drastic must be done to ensure Balkan peace. NATO intervention appears inevitable. A muddled intervention in Kosovo, however, poses a quandary that could substantially vitiate the principles driving U.S. foreign policy: Forcing the Serbs to reorganize their country would violate the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state. But denying the Albanians independence could put the Clinton administration on the wrong side of history.

Kosovo is a diamond-shaped plateau in southwestern Serbia of about 4,000 square miles (an area slightly smaller than Connecticut) surrounded by high hills and mountains. It borders Albania to the west and Macedonia to the south. According to the last census in 1991, its population is roughly 2 million, of which more than 90 percent are ethnic Albanians. It has a peasant economy and is thought to be the poorest area in Europe.

From 1974—when Kosovo was granted autonomous status under the Yugoslavian Constitution—until Serb strongman Slobodan Milosevic revoked its autonomy in 1989, Kosovo was run by Albanians, with an Albanian-language press, government and courts. Its autonomous status

allowed it a vote with the other eight units of the Yugoslav federation, often putting Serbia in the minority in federation matters.

As Yugoslavia disintegrated in the late '80s, this arrangement proved intolerable to the Serbs, who were catalyzed by worsening discrimination against the Serb minority in Kosovo. Serbia legally stripped Kosovo of its provincial prerogatives and took control. This Serb abuse of power, however, did not sit well with the Albanians. By 1991, they began to reject cooperation with the Serbs, establishing a shadow government and social institutions and lobbying the international community for self-determination. At first, the Albanian independence movement, led by charismatic, Paris-trained intellectual Ibrahim Rugova, was nonviolent. But as Serb repression intensified (on parallel with developments in Bosnia) younger Albanians increasingly turned to armed resistance.



OLEG POPOV/REUTERS

A Serb police checkpoint in Kosovo.

A year ago, the Serbs began massacring civilians and burning down villages in a "final push" to eradicate the Albanian "terrorists." This tactic backfired, of course, driving the bulk of the population into the arms of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which grew from a shadowy, rag-tag band of fighters into a superbly equipped, better-trained, highly motivated movement. Last October, under a bombing threat from

NATO, Milosevic let up slightly, after having viciously displaced more than 200,000 villagers from their homes. Most Kosovars found shelter for the winter, but fighting continued sporadically into the new year, with no end in sight.

The conflict poses a grave threat to regional stability. The greatest fear of the United States is that the fighting will spill over into neighboring states. Albania, already internally collapsed, could become a staging area or battleground. Macedonia, with its own rift between a large Albanian minority and a paranoid Macedonian majority could fragment with battles running across its porous borders. Another round of Balkan wars would destabilize Bosnia, perhaps fatally. And it's uncertain how regional powers like Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey would react—nobody wants to find out the hard way.

Independence for Kosovo seems to raise equally difficult questions. Other Balkan borders, first Bosnia's, then Macedonia's (and so on down the line), would become subject to renegotiation. An independent Kosovo probably would seek union with Albania and Albanian areas in Macedonia, while a diminished Serbia would tighten its grip on Serb areas in Bosnia. Changing those borders through force would invalidate U.S. and NATO gains in Bosnia; changing them peacefully could take decades and include distressing population transfers in the bargain. European leaders, in particular, are discouraging this "dangerous" precedent, which could support violent secessionist movements among the Basques, the Corsicans, the Northern Irish, and, perhaps most importantly, the Kurds.

Forcing the Serbs to reorganize their country would violate the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state. But denying the Albanians independence could put the Clinton administration on the wrong side of history.

The Rambouillet solution, an 80-plus page protocol recycled from Dayton, tries to straddle the issues. It would send a NATO security force of 28,000, including 4,000 Americans, to maintain peace in Kosovo. Under the plan, Serb security forces must be withdrawn and the KLA demilitarized. Local authorities, closely supervised by international bureaucrats authorized to use necessary force, would govern themselves with complete autonomy from Serbia. After three years, an international meeting would determine a final settlement. Presumably by then the fabric of society would be restored, the local population would accept the status quo and NATO would be free to leave.

Here's the catch: This strategy has failed utterly in Bosnia. There is no more fighting, but NATO is stuck. Everybody in Bosnia realizes that if NATO left, war would break out. Moreover, in Bosnia, all three warring factions—the Serbs, Croats and Muslims—wanted intervention. They were exhausted by more than four years of war and each, for different reasons, believed intervention would help preserve their gains. NATO bombing was far less a factor leading to agreement at Dayton than the balance of forces on the ground. There is a critical differ-

ence in Kosovo: Neither side really wants NATO peacekeepers under the proposed conditions.

The U.S. threats to bomb the Serbs won't persuade the Albanians to give up on independence—quite the contrary. They correctly assess that the United States, unable to walk away, probably would take sides against the Serbs if fighting escalated and spilled over to neighboring states. Even if Albanians agree to a deal that leaves independence to be resolved later, their determination ultimately to gain independence should not be discounted. The Albanians might sign with false intentions, expecting the Serbs not to sign and subsequent NATO bombing to carry the conflict to the next level.

Also, Rambouillet requires cutting off the flow of arms to the Albanians. But NATO efforts to forcibly disarm the KLA can't be expected to fare much better than those of the Serbs. Alternatively, transforming the KLA into a regular militia or police force that reports to NATO might appeal in theory, but it raises obvious Serb objections.

For its part, the Serb regime, clueless about U.S. eagerness to act, still thinks it can get away with repressing the Kosovar insurrection through force. The Serbs, anticipating the dismemberment of the remainder of Yugoslavia (including the separation of Montenegro), insist they will never allow NATO troops into Kosovo. Unless Milosevic has a sudden change of heart, he has made it plain that, like Saddam Hussein, he is willing to endure air strikes for his obstinacy. So long as Serbia objects, NATO intervention amounts to the invasion of a sovereign state—justifiable, perhaps, but best undertaken only with a high degree of unanimity among the participants, something that is sorely lacking.

France, Italy and Russia oppose uninvited intervention, but they could change their views if the threat to regional stability grows. And, even under the best conditions, NATO intervention in Kosovo could last for decades, becoming an occupation. Over this longer period, neither Russia's initial support nor allied solidarity could be counted on to continue. Such an uncertain, reactive mission would fall prey to its environment. Without a plan, in other words, NATO's strategy to reproduce Bosnia in Kosovo would not end there. Other regional crises would find leverage in the new international presence, just as the Kosovars did in Bosnia. Extending NATO's purview across the Balkans, through force and under fire, seems more like warfare than traditional democracy. The prospect of NATO waging war for an indefinite period—merely to prop up failed states—must give pause.

Ganted, without NATO temporarily in charge of Kosovo's security, the worst is inevitable. The collapse of the Balkans would do irreparable damage to NATO and wider U.S. security interests. But there is a better way. Instead of marching in, it seems more sensible to try to balance the risks. Of course, this requires an openness to previously discounted ideas.

First, Kosovo's independence should be put back on the table. If the KLA had credible guarantees of eventual independence and the possibility of uniting their ethnic kin, they might honestly cooperate with NATO's presence. In exchange for giving up Kosovo, the Serbs should be offered a territory like eastern Bosnia along with some sliver of Kosovo as compensation. Then they might be only too happy to hand off the KLA to NATO. Once NATO is in

place, a larger conference could be convened to sort out all the region's border issues. Territory swaps would benefit all the participants, including NATO, by bringing the region to the point of self-sustaining stability. It would take lengthy negotiations, but the situation wouldn't be so different from the Middle East. Indeed, the principle is the same: mediation in an open-ended (and open-minded) framework, slowly identifying the parties' common interests.

The Bosnia mission just rolls onward, unimpeded by any attempt to evaluate it. In Kosovo, the United States is about to lock in the same flawed approach.

The Macedonians and Bosnians would not be happy to lose territory in such border adjustments, even in exchange for greater security. However, neither country has vital interests at stake and, frankly, they can be bought off. Taiwan recently purchased diplomatic recognition from Macedonia for an odd billion dollars in investments (leading China to veto renewing the U.N. mission there). And the Bosnian government has repeatedly shown itself almost unnaturally adept at being bought off during and after the war, with Iranian military assistance, for example, as well as the flagrant, wholesale corruption of postwar reconstruction funds. In any case, border adjustments could actually suit Macedonian and Bosnian needs, insofar as they defuse internal clashes over minority representation.

In the long run, it would be better to set this "dangerous" precedent than to endure the inevitable harm of an endless, undefined NATO mission. The real difficulties with this plan lie not with the nationalists but with the interventionists' politically correct foreign policies. Indeed, out of the fecklessness of the international community's early response to Bosnia, exactly the wrong lesson—Balkan borders must not change—was learned. Furthermore, a vitriolic anti-Serb attitude all too often has shut out pragmatic options for peace.

In early 1992, interventionists—led by a cabal of media insiders—reduced issues to the starkest (and most exaggerated) moral choice: whether or not to stop Serb genocide in Bosnia. By avoiding the complexities of specific intervention options, they swung the vast majority of opinion among foreign policy analysts and practitioners, who initially opposed intervention, over to more or less unqualified support for

Dayton by late 1995. After Dayton, Bosnia dropped out of the news.

The policy debate now features, on the one hand, the right-wing fringe, a few serious columnists and fewer insightful academics arguing for complete disengagement. On the other, the elite establishment supports either the Clinton administration position or, sometimes, tougher measures toward the Serbs. This lethargic exchange never has gotten around to exploring alternative goals for NATO's occupation of Bosnia or, more specifically, how one might measure success. Meanwhile, the Bosnia mission just rolls onward, unimpeded by any objective attempt to evaluate it. In Kosovo, the United States is about to lock in the same flawed policy approach. Yet in Washington there is no significant debate about the obligations incurred at Rambouillet. Some in the Congress are starting to murmur their reservations, but the administration is avoiding any clarification or explanation until NATO troops are deployed.

Back in 1991, President Bush's advisers first warned of a slippery slope in the Balkans. Perhaps the slope was kinder and gentler than they imagined—indeed, it's so gradual that one doesn't notice how hard it is to keep from falling into the quagmire until it's too late. ■

George Kenney, who writes on foreign affairs from Washington, is a former foreign service officer who resigned from the State Department in 1992 to protest Bush administration policy in the former Yugoslavia.

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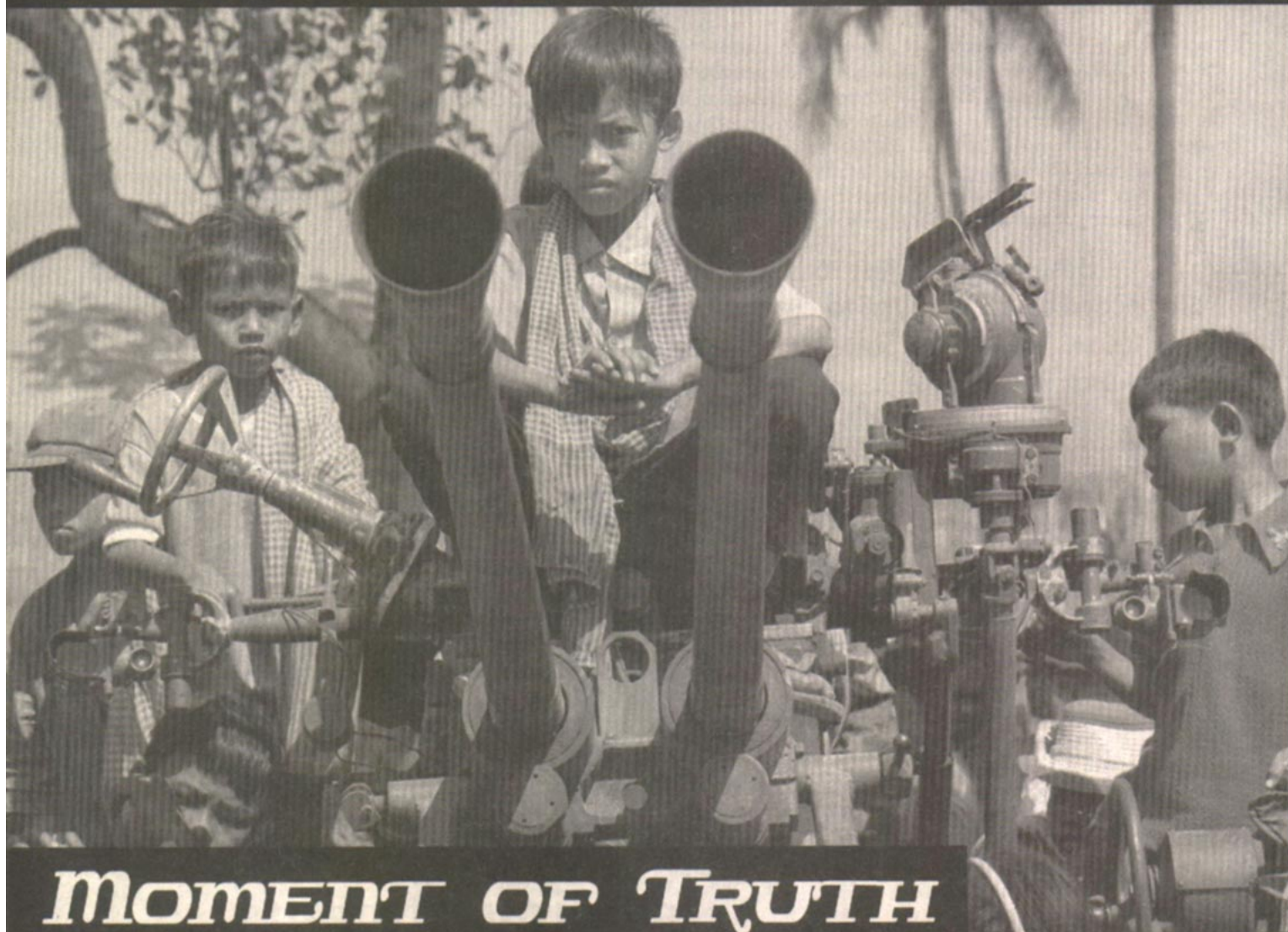
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MOMENT OF TRUTH

WILL CAMBODIA CONFRONT THE PAST?

By AMANDA HICKMAN

SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

At the Salina Hotel in the northwestern town of Siem Reap, the 26-year-old desk clerk is chatting about trying to go to college in Australia to study computers. It's a long shot, but she couldn't afford college when she first graduated, and now she has been out of school too long to apply to a Cambodian university. When I ask her about the Khmer Rouge, she is furious. "I hate the Khmer Rouge," she says through clenched teeth. "I hate them."

Then, in a gesture familiar to anyone who asks enough Cambodians about the Khmer Rouge, she ticks off on her fingers the family who were killed, then gives up and counts off those who remain. Two, her mother and sister. Her father was a civil servant in Phnom Penh. When the Khmer Rouge evacuated the city in 1975, residents were forced to march to the countryside. The Khmer Rouge announced that they needed help setting up the new government. Anyone with experience who wanted to help run

the country was told to return to the capital. She never saw her father again.

Her older brothers died too. Now, without her father she cannot afford to return to Phnom Penh. She is sure that she would have gone to college if her father were alive. Looking around the lobby, she says, "I would not have to be working here."

No one ever has been held publicly accountable for the Khmer Rouge's murderous regime. In June 1997, then co-prime ministers Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh petitioned the United Nations for assistance in bringing the Khmer Rouge to justice. Their request coincided with growing international pressure, and the U.N. General Assembly convened a committee to explore the possibility of a U.N. tribunal. That committee has not publicly released its recommendations, but the *New York Times* has reported that the committee will call for a criminal trial of top Khmer Rouge leaders in a neutral country, along with a separate South

Africa-style truth commission inside Cambodia. Human rights activists, as well as many Cambodians in and outside of the country, support this idea, saying some form of a tribunal is necessary to begin to restore the rule of law in this ravaged country. Other Cambodians argue that a trial would only renew the civil war.

In 1949, Cambodia was still a French protectorate when a young man named Saloth Sar was sent to Paris for his education. He returned in 1953 and began working with young Cambodian Communists. Ten years later he was elected to lead the Worker's Party of Kampuchea, which would become known as the Khmer Rouge. In 1969, while the Khmer Rouge were organizing rural support for communist revolution, the United States launched its first bombing campaign in the Cambodian jungle along the Vietnamese border, where they believed the Vietcong had set up command centers. Again in 1973, U.S. bombers fanned out over the jungle, dropping 257,465 tons of explosives on Cambodia during a seven-month deluge.

On New Year's Day 1975—under the leadership of Sar, who had taken the *nom de guerre* Pol Pot—the Khmer Rouge launched a full-scale offensive on Phnom Penh. Within months, the Khmer Rouge took the capital and ordered all residents to return to their home provinces, where they were grouped into agricultural cooperatives. Crops went to feed the army and buy arms while the rest of the country was forced into back-breaking labor and subsisted on meager rations of rice. Toul Sleng, a high school on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, became Security Office 21, where thousands of intellectuals, monks, civil servants, ethnic minorities and purged Khmer Rouge cadres were tortured into signing confessions of treason and executed. By the time Vietnam toppled the Khmer Rouge in 1979, nearly 2 million Cambodians had died of starvation, exhaustion or execution.

The Vietnamese installed a puppet government led by Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge cadre who had fled Pol Pot's violent purges. Throughout much of the '80s, the United States supported a coalition of two non-communist groups and the Khmer Rouge fighting the Vietnamese occupation. Though U.S. aid was supposed to go only to non-communist forces, in practice it was funneled to Khmer Rouge guerrillas.

The Vietnamese pulled out in 1990, and Cambodia held its first free elections in 1993. While nearly 20 parties participated in the election, two quickly took the lead: the Cambodian People's Party, led by Hun Sen, and FUNCINPEC, led by Prince Ranariddh, the son of King Sihanouk. Ranariddh recently had returned from exile, while Hun Sen had served as prime minister, backed by Vietnam, since 1985. Neither party won a majority of votes, but Ranariddh had the plurality. Nonetheless, Hun Sen muscled in a power-sharing arrangement under which the two men were co-prime ministers. The arrangement was never stable, and it collapsed in 1997 when Hun Sen accused the prince of organizing the Khmer Rouge against him and ousted his co-prime minister in a bloody clash.

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge still controlled vast swaths of the jungle, though their grip was beginning to slip. First, the province of Pailin, once a Khmer Rouge stronghold, surrendered to the government. Then in 1997, Pol Pot, after ordering

the execution of one of his top aides, was deposed by his own cadres. When Pol Pot died in April 1998, the Khmer Rouge still controlled much of the countryside, but it was in shambles. Most former leaders had surrendered and were living openly around the country. In December 1998, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, the Khmer Rouge head of state and Pol Pot's right-hand man, respectively, surrendered with their troops, leaving only the notorious general Ta Mok at large. His troops surrendered without him, and when he was finally captured in early March, the Khmer Rouge looked to be finished.

The 500-mile road between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh should connect the country, but it's a 12-hour drive that only can be made by pickup truck because the government lacks the resources to repair damage wrought by the Khmer Rouge and the long monsoon season. Trucks that make the journey often stop to pay off self-appointed toll collectors, who demand a few cigarettes for the right to pass. At one point in the road, three 5-year-olds, unarmed and waiting, blocked traffic with their bicycles. For the low price of few hundred riel, they wheeled their bikes aside with a smile.

With an infrastructure thrashed by years of war, a lack of basic human provisions like safe drinking water, and a low per capita GDP that ranks with Sudan, Cambodia desperately needs foreign aid. In late February, the Consultative Group on Cambodia—a coalition of donor nations and international agencies, including the IMF, the World Bank, the United States and Japan—convened in Tokyo for its third meeting to discuss aid for Cambodia and assess the country's progress toward rebuilding the economy. In total, the group pledged a combined \$470 million in aid, much of it the first support for Cambodia since the 1997 coup. The money could go a long way toward rebuilding the country if the government can maintain the shaky peace.

The NGO Forum on Cambodia, a group of more than 400 different organizations, submitted a report to the February

"IF YOU WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUTURE CIVIL WARS IN CAMBODIA, YOU MAY CONTINUE TO CALL FOR A TRIAL."

meeting in which they presented a laundry list of priorities for the country, from protection of rural land rights to reducing police impunity. With one voice, they argued that an international tribunal is necessary to answer the lingering questions about what really happened after Pol Pot came to power.

The international community has been supportive of the prospects of a tribunal, with the notable exception of China, which provided Pol Pot with munitions as well as government consultants during his reign. But China has indicated that it will not oppose a trial if it is supported by Cambodia itself. As Hun Sen was deflecting criticism of the warm reception showered on Chea and Samphan in December, the prime minister pointedly stated that he would welcome a trial addressing all the war years through 1988. Such a trial would mean addressing U.S. and U.N. support for the Khmer Rouge during the '80s. While Hun Sen's comment was meant rhetorically, the United States has never acknowledged its role in prolonging the civil war.



Former Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan is living free in retirement.

ROB ELLIOT/AF

foundations working in the region, Cambodian Minister of Commerce Cham Prasidh angrily challenged the audience to consider the consequences of bringing the Khmer Rouge before a judge. He accused the Cambodian Diaspora of calling for a trial when they don't have to live with the consequences at home. Tucked away in places like Seattle and Lowell, Mass., they won't go hungry if civil war ravages the rice yield. "If you will take responsibility for future civil wars in Cambodia," he told the gathering, "you may continue to call for a trial."

After their surrender, Chea and Samphan retired to Pailin, which remains largely independent from Phnom Penh, where they joined a handful of former Khmer Rouge leaders. The few former Khmer Rouge officials now active in the national government say that they will not resist being called before a tribunal, but the retirees in Pailin have made no such promises. As the last Khmer Rouge generals surrendered, their troops were absorbed into the national army. Though Hun Sen split up battalions that had served together in the jungle, no one has tested the allegiance of these soldiers. Some argue it's better for Phnom Penh to keep the United Nations at bay for a few more years. The remaining defendants will slough off quietly and the country can avoid a real trial.

However, it's not just the international community who wants a tribunal. A handful of surveys have been taken, none truly empirical, which reveal that many Cambodians living in the country want to see the leaders of the Khmer Rouge face a judge. Jaya Ramji, a Yale Law student, conducted a series of interviews around the country in 1997—nobody in her small sample said they did not want a trial. Opposition leader Sam Rainsy released a separate study claiming that 80 percent of the population wants to see the Khmer Rouge on trial. While politically motivated, the French Institute for Statistics, authors of the latter poll, did not pull their figures out of thin air.

In receiving Chea and Samphan, Hun Sen called on Cambodians to "dig a hole and bury the past." In the months since, he has retracted that sentiment, but he avoids publicly

In its set of recommendations for a tribunal, the U.N. Group of Experts managed to sidestep some of the questions about what form international justice should take. Under the U.N. recommendations, top Khmer Rouge leaders, members of the Standing Committee responsible for leading the country, would stand trial at an International Criminal Tribunal for Cambodia in a neutral country. Separate from the tribunal, the U.N. group calls for a truth commission within Cambodia. The commission which would function more like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, possibly offering immunity in exchange for the open cooperation of lower-ranking party members.

In January, the Conference of the Forum on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, an umbrella group for nongovernmental aid and development organizations, universities and

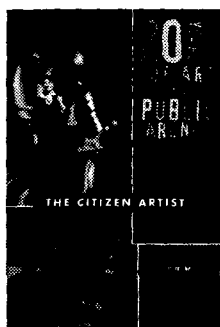
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supporting a tribunal. In a dramatic twist, Phnom Penh has ordered Ta Mok to choose a lawyer to defend him in a Cambodian military court. According to wire service reports, Hun Sen is planning to refuse to allow Ta Mok to be tried abroad. Letting Pailin strong-arm the country into letting

"IT IS JUST SO FRUSTRATING. WE KNOW WE HAVE MOUNTAINS OF RECORDS. BUT THEY KEEP TALKING ABOUT A TRIAL. TALK IS CHEAP."

bygones be bygones won't bring reconciliation, but most Cambodia watchers are wary that a dramatic trial for Ta Mok could derail the broader international tribunal.

The likely first stop for prosecutors preparing a tribunal is the Documentation Center of Cambodia. Since 1995, the center, with funding from a handful of countries, including the United States, has been cataloging records of Khmer Rouge atrocities, conducting interviews and burrowing through mountains of internal Khmer Rouge documents to compile a massive database on the four years of Democratic Kampuchea. On a shoestring budget, the center has been mapping killing fields, identifying victims, sorting and cross referencing the impeccable records left behind at Toul Sleng, including photographs and signed confessions extracted from the 16,000 Cambodians executed there. Youk Chhang, the center's director, has been waiting years for a trial. He says it won't be easy, but he compares the trial to going to the dentist: It is painful, but if you never go, you will have no teeth. "It is just so frustrating," he says. "We know. We have mountains of records. But they keep talking about a trial. Talk is cheap."

But Chhang has a bigger concern at the moment. He needs fireproof cases for the 300,000 pages of original documents stored on open shelves in his office. As it is, the center's materials all omit the address of the center, and the unmarked building is protected by high metal fences and armed guards, but Chhang remains worried about the security problems a trial could bring. Most of the center's documents have been duplicated and Yale's Cambodian Genocide Project has put much of the database online (www.yale.edu/cgp), but the original documents remain unprotected.

Just 60 miles from the Thai border, under the shade of a tree at Banteay Srei, an intricate sandstone temple, a group of young policemen plays cards with an amputee whose prosthetic leg rests against a tree. Looking around at the row of food stalls and shops shaded by palm leaves, it is hard to believe that this area was ever controlled by a guerilla army, but as late as 1996, travel to Banteay Srei required a special permit and armed guards for the 19-mile trip from Siem Reap. As we roll through a village of houses on stilts and laundry drying in the sun, our tour guide assures us that there have been no "incidents" along this road for at least six months. I look out the window for some sign of armed bandits as a group of toddlers jump up from their lunch to wave at the passing bus. I thought it must seem strange to see us passing through, a bus load of tourists bouncing down the pitted road, smiling as though we had

never heard of a war in Cambodia. We reached the temple and parked alongside five other buses.

From a distance, the countryside looks untouched, but dozens of NGOs and local activists have worked tirelessly to ensure that development of rural Cambodia won't threaten its residents. The vast majority of Cambodians may not be rallying in the streets daily, but more than 90 percent of eligible voters turned out in the past two national elections. Cambodians are carefully watching international developments, keenly aware that an entire generation has never known peace.

Cambodia needs to know the truth. Outside the country, information is there for those who want it, but rural Cambodians can't just pop off to Blockbuster to rent *Swimming to Cambodia*. Most Cambodians give Vietnam little credit for rescuing them from Pol Pot; some suspect the whole regime was actually masterminded by the Vietnamese. If the country is going to move forward and build a civil society, they must either collectively agree to pretend that the world evaporated between 1975 and 1978 or crack open the whole story for all to see. After years of exacerbating the violence in Cambodia, the international community owes it to Cambodia to make a peaceful trial possible. Cambodians shouldn't have to accept silence. ■

Amanda Hickman is a reporter who lives in New York.

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THE SON ALSO RISES?

Jordan's uncertain future

By Charmaine Seitz

AMMAN, JORDAN

Tall columns rise oddly out of southern Jordan's red sandstone cliffs. The Petran architecture appears Roman, except for telltale spirals curling in the column capitals. Here the ancient Nabatean designer added his own touches to a building style borrowed from trading partners across the sea.

Modern Jordan is no different from that Nabatean architect—the small nation created on land once inhabited by nomads has borrowed and blended to shape its contemporary culture. “Jordan was never the basis of a massive civilization,” Jordanian journalist Rami Khouri says. “It has always had to live according to its wits.”

For the past 46 years, those wits belonged to King Hussein bin Talal. Now that the king has died, Jordanians face an uncertain future. “He brought the world to our door,” says Mahmoud Katamish, a tour guide in Aqaba. Literally speaking, Katamish is right. Hussein's funeral on Feb. 8 brought nearly 50 heads of state to Amman. Many of them, like the presidents of Turkey and Cyprus or leaders of Israel and Syria, laid aside hostilities to pay homage to the well-liked monarch. While Jordanians revered their king for his humility and accessibility, world leaders respected the kind of commitment Hussein displayed by flying from his sickbed to last fall's Wye Plantation talks in a push for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

But the King's popularity is not the only explanation for the large turnout at his funeral. Many leaders came to show their support for the existence of Jordan itself, now a nation of 4.6 million people. Created through British gerrymandering in 1921, the dry, resource-poor colony was drawn into existence primarily to create a friendly buffer in the Middle East. Now that the pragmatic Hussein has passed away, the world is watching to see how this strategic space on the map and its new king, Hussein's 37-year-old son Abdullah, fare in today's turbulent climate.

When Jordan was granted its independence in 1946, the country was run primarily by clan leaders, who petitioned favor from the first King Abdullah, Hussein's grandfather. At that time, Jordan adopted the French penal code and British civil law. Years later, the country is still struggling to meld Western systems into Arab values.

Abdullah was a pragmatist (some say opportunist) who didn't oppose the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Such views, however, didn't keep Jordan out of the 1948 war between Jewish forces and the surrounding Arab states—and in the final armistice, Jordan managed to gain control of the West Bank and half of Jerusalem (which it lost in the 1967 Six-Day War), absorbing more than a million new Palestinian

citizens. Abdullah's grandson, Hussein, was left to deal with the changing Jordanian society when Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian in Jerusalem in 1951.

Hussein earned his reputation as a strong monarch seven years later, when, at 21, he survived a coup attempt. In 1970, he drove out a Palestinian threat to his rule, killing hundreds. That battle, in which Yasser Arafat-led Palestinian fighters were routed by the Jordanian Army, remains “Black September” to Palestinians but stands as a symbol of Jordan's tenuous autonomy to non-Palestinian Jordanians.

Jordan wasn't the only Arab nation to experience upheaval and face overwhelming ideological challenges in adapting to modern statehood. Since the early '80s, with the fall of communism, the rise of ethnic nationalism and the draw of political Islam, the Middle East has undergone unrest and civil war. While Jordan largely has avoided long-lasting bloody conflicts, it has witnessed the rise of Islamism and an almost catastrophic devaluation of its currency.

In this climate, Jordan has undergone 15 years of immense commercial changes. The economic boom began when neighboring Iraq could no longer pay for expensive imports because it was pouring money into the Iran-Iraq War. Instead, it arranged for Jordan to produce its tables, chairs and other necessities, jump-starting local industry.

That same Jordanian reliance on wealthy neighbors proved devastating when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Much of Jordan's economy depended upon laborers in Gulf states who were sent home after the king angered their leaders by supporting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, with the Allies' closure of the Gulf of Aqaba, Jordan's large shipping industry suffered dearly and only recently has started to recover.

Today, Jordan remains in an economic slump. Its population will increase by 3 percent this year, while its economic growth is expected to be slightly less. Currently the annual average per capita income is approximately \$1,500, and unless Jordan manages to capitalize upon the tourist wave expected for millennial celebrations, few expect that to rise. If the current drought continues, it will ravage local crops, underscoring Jordan's feeling of vulnerability among its resource-rich neighbors.

When President Bill Clinton came to Hussein's funeral, he brought with him a \$300 million aid package that slowly is making its way through Congress. The Clinton administration has prioritized foreign aid to Jordan in hopes that the small state will remain one of its few friends in the region. “This isn't charity,” says one embassy official, “this is what we determine to be in U.S. interests.”

Economist Riyadh Khouri (Rami's brother) is wary of these kinds of handouts. He says that foreign aid only shores up Jordan's already burgeoning military state. Instead, he hopes Jordan will take advantage of the coming millennium to broaden its tourist industry and diversify its markets. Yet without an investment in security and stability, Riyadh admits, Jordan's economy will suffer further. The government is Jordan's largest employer, and unemployment already is running at around 30 percent. "If only you could solve the problem of the Palestinians," he says, "then maybe Jordan could develop a real economy"—one not based merely upon Jordan's strategic importance.

But Jordan cannot escape its own dependence upon peace in the region. As long as the Palestinians remain without a state of their own, Jordan's Palestinian refugees will continue to clamor for a home. And as long as Israel remains isolated in the region, Jordan's own peace with the Jewish state will remain awkward at best. Hussein's support of Iraq against the Allies in the Gulf War exemplifies its problem of serving as a buffer between hostile states. Although Jordan lost money and Western ties by siding with Saddam Hussein, its king was unable to go against public sentiment and join the allies. Once King Hussein backed away from Iraq, cozied up to the United States, and eventually made peace with Israel, he became vulnerable to charges of thwarting democracy.

Hence it is with trepidation that Jordanians are closely watching the upcoming Israeli elections. If hard-line Likud Party Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wins office once again and peace talks remain at a standstill, Jordan, where Palestinians make up 70 percent of the population, can expect problems. Trade with Israel would continue to slow and regional instability would drive tourists away. Most Jordanians agree that until the Palestinian problem is solved—that is, an Israeli government comes to power that is able to forge a lasting peace—Jordan will remain tied to the world's strategic needs at the expense of its own growth.

Faced with all these difficulties, the last thing that Jordanians needed was to get used to a new king. Chosen in an eleventh hour decision over King Hussein's brother, Crown Prince Hassan (who had been groomed to be king much of his adult life), King Abdullah is very much a mystery to many of his subjects. Educated in the United States, he has kept a low profile as head of the Jordanian Special Forces. "He has the basic ingredients," says Abba Amawi, a sociologist who once taught the new king. "He is kind-hearted and humble."

Even those who were critical of his father have high hopes

for where Abdullah might lead the country. In handling threats to his country or regime, Hussein used both democratic institutions and his ability to shut down parliamentary opposition to his advantage. The late king's most vocal critics say he presented the trappings of a democratic state, but choked civil society in the name of unity. Labib Kamhawi, a university professor

whose criticism of the monarchy has kept him out of the classroom, says that since Hussein dissolved parliament in 1993, Jordan "is back to square one" as a developing democracy. However, Kamhawi believes that because Abdullah does not share the same public support as his father, the new monarch will be forced to introduce more power-sharing, a change that will help build democratic institutions.

Abdullah took one step in that direction by ousting many ministers loyal to his uncle, replacing them with more liberal politicians and technocrats. Day-to-day government operations will be led by an outspoken and media-savvy prime minister, Abdul-Raouf Rawabdeh. Such changes in a system that has seen 84 different governments since its inception do not mean the monarchy is on its way out. For many Jordanians, however, a new system isn't the answer. "People don't mind having a king," Rami Khouri says, "as long as the king works for them."

Those who are pessimistic say that Abdullah's background as head of Jordan's Special Forces only guarantees that the country will remain highly militarized. However, the new monarch can use his international network of military officials, many of them a young generation of future Arab leaders, to aid his country. These contacts are strongest in the Gulf, where one Saudi prince already has promised to sell Jordan local oil at a reduced rate, as well as to ease restrictions on Jordanian laborers.

There are also those—certainly Syria and Iraq—waiting to test the young king. Palestinian leader Arafat angered Jordanian leaders by reintroducing the idea of a confederacy with Jordan only one week after Hussein's death. The late king had finessed that issue, a proposition not necessarily in Jordan's interests, by saying confederacy can

only happen between two independent states. But Arafat, staring down the approaching May 4 expiration of the Oslo peace accords, seems to be exploring all his options.

The history of the modern Jordanian state is no longer intimately tied with only one man. But while Jordanians are anxious about how Abdullah will rise to the many challenges he faces, they are confident the nation will survive. Blending the traditions of the desert and ties of family life with the influence of its neighbors and the West, contemporary Jordan will endure in the same way as the ancient Nabateans—carving new patterns while making use of the old. ■

Charmaine Seitz writes regularly on the Middle East. She lives near Jerusalem.



Now that the popular Hussein (above) has died, the world is closely watching the new king, his son Abdullah.

By Salim Muwakkil

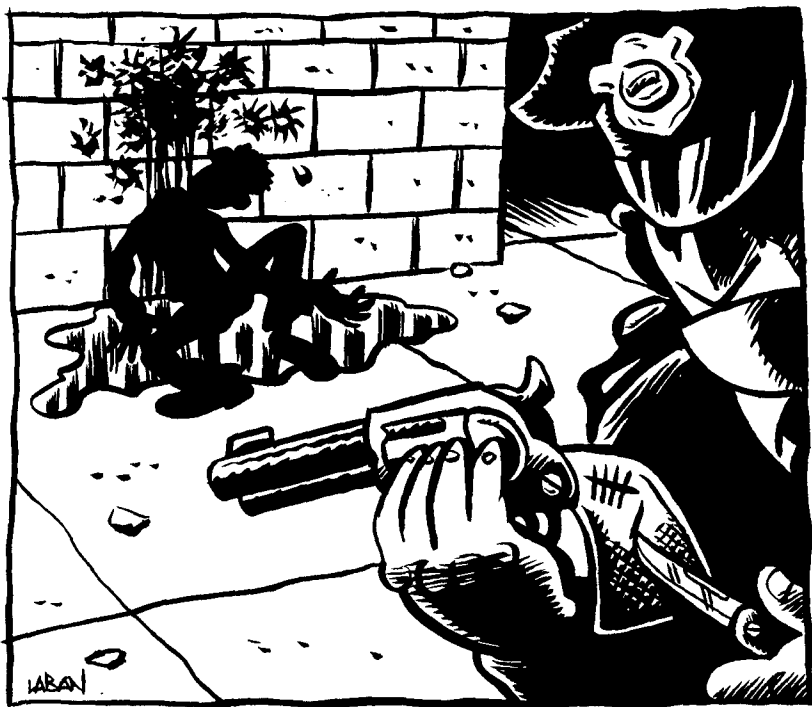
Once again, the streets of America are filling up with marchers protesting murderous police. This time, the proximate causes are the 19-bullet execution of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in New York and the 12-bullet termination of 19-year-old Tyisha Miller in Riverside, Calif. But underlying this new round of protests is the realization that police departments across the country are brutalizing minority youth with growing frequency and relative impunity.

The 31 bullets police used to kill these two victims were less than half of the 68 total shots they fired. The all-white cop crew who killed Diallo on Feb. 4 as he stood unarmed in the vestibule of his Bronx apartment building unloaded 41 bullets. Another four cops fired 27 shots at Miller's body after she was startled awake while sleeping in a disabled car on Dec. 28. The black teenager allegedly had a gun and, according to the police, reached for it when one of the officers broke the car window. The police claimed Miller fired at them first, but they later recanted that story.

Outrage has been building over the past few years as the list of innocent victims of police violence lengthens. But the executions of Miller and Diallo triggered demands for action. On Feb. 25, a wide-ranging coalition of civil rights groups called a news conference asking President Clinton to order a national summit on police brutality. "It is most necessary, Mr. President, for you not to see this as a New York problem or a Pittsburgh problem or a Los Angeles problem, but as a national problem," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, a member of the Feb. 25 coalition, has been leading daily demonstrations in New York against police violence since the Diallo shooting. On March 3, Sharpton mobilized nearly 5,000 people in a protest on Wall Street to "let the business community know that we won't permit business-as-usual" as long as the police department remains unaccountable to the city's black and Latino citizens. Sharpton and 28 others were arrested following the demonstration and vowed to commit more acts of civil disobedience.

Other protests—some calling for more minority police recruitment, others urging Black Panther-type militia groups—have taken place throughout the city almost daily. On Feb. 27, about 500 members of the Black Men's Movement (including members of Khallid Abdul Muhammad's New Black Panthers) marched through



TERRY LABAN

No Cop Accountability

What will it take to stop police brutality?

Brooklyn protesting police violence and urging armed self-defense. A group called Women for Justice mobilized nearly 1,000 people for a rally outside City Hall on March 8.

As president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, the Rev. Jesse Jackson has been leading an ongoing national crusade to denounce the quickening tempo of outrageous police violence. At the Feb. 25 news conference, Jackson said that many of the nation's police officers have succumbed to an "almost fascist madness" that has had a terrorizing effect on minority neighborhoods.

On Feb. 27 Jackson led a march of about 1,000 people in Riverside to condemn police action in the Miller killing. Jackson excoriated the Riverside police for acting as a "firing squad" in killing Miller. Mayor Ron Loveridge refused to meet with Jackson, city officials accused him of inciting racial discord and Jeffrey Joseph, president of the Riverside Police Officers Association, said the reverend was more interested in sound bites than finding the truth. The case is being investigated by the Riverside County district attorney's office, which is expected to release its findings soon. The FBI also is monitoring the shooting to determine whether the Justice Department should launch a full-scale civil rights investigation.

The number of police abuse incidents over the last few years are too numerous to list. But none of them have been compelling enough to attract the sustained interest of the coun-

try's political leadership—perhaps because blacks and Latinos are the usual targets. Although dozens of protests demanding police accountability have been held in virtually every major city in America, there has been a persistent failure to investigate and punish officers who brutally violate citizens' rights.

Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch issued reports last year that scathingly criticized the racist brutality of U.S. law enforcement. The Human Rights Watch report cataloged patterns of law enforcement behavior in 14 major cities and found that police

Outrage has been building the past few years as the list of innocent victims of police violence lengthens.

brutality is a "common human rights abuse." The report documents unjustified shootings, severe beatings and fatal chokings of suspects—as well as the superior officers and government officials who fail to penalize or prosecute the cops.

Human Rights Watch singled out the New York Police Department, specifically faulting Police Commissioner Howard Safir and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who called the report "patently dishonest." He was equally dismissive of a 1996 Amnesty International study, which discerned a racist pattern of abuse and found that the NYPD routinely violated international human rights standards as well as its own guidelines governing the use of deadly force. An updated study released last August cited Giuliani's failure to accept the recommendations of a task force on brutality, which he had appointed following the alleged torture of Abner Louima. A Haitian immigrant, Louima suffered serious internal injuries in August 1997 after New York police officers allegedly beat him and rammed the handle of a toilet plunger into his rectum at a Brooklyn police station.

Of course, it's not just the Big Apple that's being rotted out by police brutality. In 1990, Amnesty International issued a report describing police torture and brutality in Chicago, and 10 black inmates still sit on Death Row largely because of confessions extracted by that torture. The group studied the Los Angeles Police Department in a 1992 report that documented widespread racial bias and rampant brutality. Though the findings were a bit more congenially welcomed by a city administration already rocked by one of the largest urban riots of the 20th century, L.A. officials generally ignored the report. Nationwide, police officials have scoffed at the reports. "We're not saying there aren't a few bad cops," said Gerald Arenberg, the head of the National Association of the Chiefs of Police, in response to the Human Rights Watch report. "What we're saying is that the report presents an inappropriately broad-brushed impression."

The inability to change law enforcement practices is frustrating many activists. "After a while, people get tired of protesting for nothing," says Ron Daniels, executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. "I mean, how would you feel if you participated in march after march and rally after rally, and the problem kept repeating itself?"

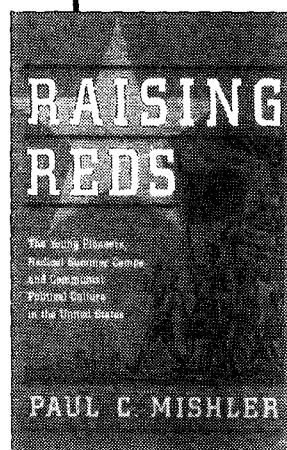
This lack of success is driving a call for more drastic action. Lawyers working with the Center for Constitutional Rights are attempting a novel legal strategy. They filed a lawsuit on behalf of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights to halt operations of the New York Street Crimes

Unit, a division that includes the cops who shot Diallo. Using police statistics, the suit contends that the unit illegally stopped and searched 35,000 people over the past two years because they were members of minority groups. "We've found a sweeping pattern of aggressive policing that is out of control and, at the heart of it, we believe, unconstitutional," Daniels says.

The issue of racial targeting, or "profiling," was also at the heart of a controversy in neighboring New Jersey, where Gov. Christine Todd Whitman fired the head of the state police for remarks that seemed to sanction such profiling. And the Justice Department has launched a national investigation to determine whether state troopers have been singling out black drivers.

For the most part, white Americans remain unwilling to acknowledge the clear evidence of misconduct among law enforcement officers. They are willing to accept such race-specific misconduct as the price of protection. The logic of this social calculus excuses police excess; since the media face of crime is black and male, it's only logical that black males are the "natural enemies" of law enforcement. In recent weeks, the national conscience has been raised about the issue of racially disproportionate police misconduct, but the question remains: Will anything be done to change it? That same question has been left hanging before: Some 300 cities exploded in violence during the turbulent '60s, and nearly every riot was provoked by police abuse. ■

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Shellshock

By Joshua Rothkopf

In a spirit of what might be called tidiness, many critics have christened 1998 as the Year of the World War II Movie. The spin goes something like this: Three ambitious war films, steeped in well-meaning intent and a nobility reaching beyond entertainment, converge to clash on the televisual battlefield for gold-plated statuettes (and hearts and minds). The three movies, all in competition for

Saving Private Ryan
Directed by Steven Spielberg

Life Is Beautiful
Directed by Roberto Benigni

The Thin Red Line
Directed by Terrence Malick

Best Picture, are *Saving Private Ryan*, Steven Spielberg's popular epic; *Life Is Beautiful*, directed and co-written by its star, Italian comedian Roberto Benigni; and Terrence Malick's long-awaited *The Thin Red Line*.

Ignore for a moment the vulgarity of this promotional combat—which gives new meaning to “campaign in the European theater”—and you can see how potentially fruitful it is. The filmmakers can congratulate their competitors with the high-mindedness found only in faculty meetings and the Yalta Conference, while the Academy can clothe itself in fashionable sobriety, its recognitions recast as tantamount to saving the free world.

Still, with every journalistic puff piece burning with reverence for the “boys in the war,” we get further from exploring what is truly provocative about these films. All three are “authored” to a rare degree of personality by filmmakers who came of age well after the war; all three were made in enviable creative atmospheres of little studio interference. And as such, they reveal perspectives on war that are decidedly contemporary in

their technological immersion while strangely alienated from narrative or psychology, stylistically daring but timid to explore the ramifications of this century's pivotal moment.

Spielberg has utilized a World War II context in many films, returning with a hobbyist's regularity. His bombastic Pearl Harbor-panic comedy, *1941*, is stunning not only to the degree in which it fails, but where it falls in his career: right after *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, when Spielberg could have done almost anything he wished. There must have been great appeal in the spectacle and innocence of that project—Belushi bombers and U.S.O. babes—for him to have risked so much.

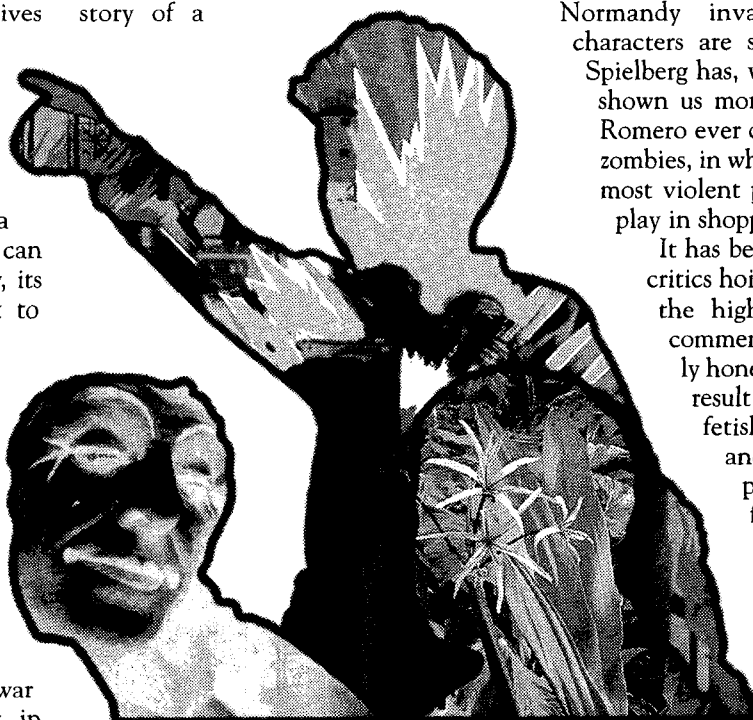
The war again provides something of a moral shorthand in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and its two sequels, which quickly position marauding Nazis against the swashbuckling American hero, Indiana Jones. Even as unlikely a film as *Jaws* has some of its purity anchored in a quiet monologue delivered by its grizzled seadog, Quint, who recounts the story of a

sinking WWII battleship and the sharks that came to feed.

Something's at play here: a predilection toward a simple politic much in keeping with Spielberg's total project. It's the childlike wonderment we associate with his more commercial sci-fi fantasies, but tempered with a nostalgia for a climate of distinct moral choices. Much was made of Spielberg's “graduation” to a more nuanced presentation with *Schindler's List*, but that film is very much an extension of this naïve outlook, and in that light, a safe work—the only happy ending to have come out of the Holocaust. Only with *Empire of the Sun*, based on J.G. Ballard's account of a childhood spent in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, does Spielberg collide his sensibility with the damning reality of grown-ups; that film was criticized for its emotional remoteness but reveals itself to be his most mature and affecting.

Saving Private Ryan is the apotheosis of Spielberg's awed but steadfastly non-critical approach to World War II. The rapt gaze taking in wondrous events—the surest expression in all of Spielberg's work, from *Close Encounters* to *E.T.* to *Jurassic Park*—is imposed directly onto the viewer with the explosive forcefulness of the film's opening sequence, a sustained 20-minute recreation of the Normandy invasion. Before any characters are seriously introduced, Spielberg has, with obsessive detail, shown us more gore than George Romero ever did with his cannibal zombies, in what must surely be the most violent piece of film ever to play in shopping malls.

It has been amusing to watch critics hoist this explicitness to the highest level of merit, commending as unflinchingly honest what is merely the result of Spielberg's twin fetishizations of warfare and filmcraft. But in providing first and foremost a visceral experience, *Saving Private Ryan* suggests a vacancy: The grave reasons behind the war need not be explored or



STEVE ANDERSON

questioned, Spielberg implies, or even simply reasserted. His film shrinks from an explanation of any kind, with the ultimate effect of seeming insensitive to the enormity of the fascist threat and the convictions of those who died in battles so faithfully reproduced here.

Compounding this tacit avoidance is Ryan's story proper, which seems detachable even in the kindest light. Tom Hanks plays the captain of a small squad that, after the beach assault, is reassigned to a special operation: Locate a missing-in-action private whose three brothers have all died in the fighting. So as to avoid visiting a devastating loss on the mother, top generals see fit to relieve the surviving brother of further duty and send him home—if only he can be found.

This charitable diversion of a mission bears little relevance to the social mobilization and sacrifice that won the war. Instead it speaks to the humanistic sensibilities that served Spielberg better in *Schindler's List* and that film's Talmudic underpinnings: "To save one life is to save the world entire." *Saving Private Ryan*, though, suffers mightily from its distractedness, and for no good reason; once the private is found, he refuses to leave his besieged troop—and the film concludes with another extended battle scene. It's not surprising that many critics have defended these brutal tours-de-force while rejecting the rest of the film. They are as kinetic as anything Spielberg has ever done, and ring the truest in capturing front-line immediacy. Yet in concentrating only on surface fidelities, Spielberg remains unwilling—or unable—to grasp the crisis in all its terrible necessity. His film is the document of a beneficiary of the war, so convinced of its righteousness as to take reason for granted.

Writing in the February issue of *Sight and Sound*, J. Hoberman makes the perceptive link between Spielberg and *Life Is Beautiful*, arguing that only an acclaimed work like *Schindler's List*—with its positive reconfiguration of the Holocaust as mass entertainment and moral proving ground—could have made room for Benigni's farce.

One can take Hoberman's point a step further: In spinning an elaborate lie to his son to make bearable the horror of their internment in a concentration camp, the Benigni character can be seen to both embody and shrewdly comment on the Spielberg strategy, desperately mining dignity and laughs out of the most unlikely circumstances.

If *Life Is Beautiful* was content to serve this purpose as a corrective to Holocaust revisionism, it would be time for us to raise our glasses to Benigni. But unfortunately, the actor is also writer and director, resulting (perhaps unavoidably) in a film that hopes to spare audiences from pain as much as children. It is one thing to have a father powerlessly massaging his son's fears: "Buttons and soap out of people—you fell for that? It's a trick to get you out of the game!" We never actually see that soap though, and the film lacks the crucial counterpoint it needs to be effective. Emblematic of this denial is a scene where father and son wander

upon a heap of naked dead bodies, shrouded in mist and too subtly rendered to make its point.

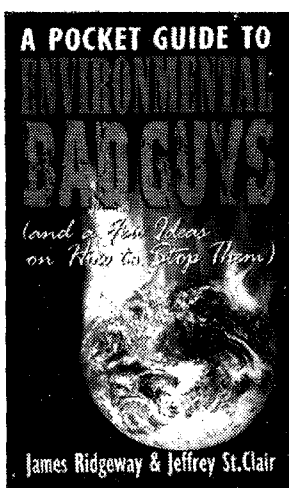
Infantilization of the viewer reaches its nadir when the father, dressed in drag and filmed from a low, boy's-eye perspective, jauntily marches to his off-screen death. With this final stroke, Benigni robs his film of the significance it might have had, instead substituting more than a whiff of narcissism: We love Benigni too much to see him suffer.

The obvious reference is Chaplin, who in begging our identification with the "little people"—as he does in the sermon that concludes *The Great Dictator*—spoke rather condescendingly of his global audience. Benigni, like many director-comedians, idolizes Chaplin; he may have studied him so hard as to sabotage his own impulses. *Life Is Beautiful*, in this context, takes its place most clearly as a vanity production and homage rather than anything approaching catharsis of one of the ugliest episodes in recent times.

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**THUNDER'S
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Stumbling into the fray of war revisitations is *The Thin Red Line*, Terrence Malick's first production in 20 years. The film bears all the marks of Malick's intelligent style: excellent performances across the board, a leisurely pace that allows for generous reflection, beautiful camerawork in the pink-lit "golden hour" of dusk. But perhaps because of the success of *Saving Private Ryan*, theater-goers are leaving screenings miffed, stymied by the film's obtuseness when what they really wanted was, as Spielberg recently put it in *The New York Times Magazine*, "a bad-ass World War II movie." (Perhaps Malick would have been wiser to postpone his opus for next year's scheduled Comeback of the Reclusive Genius.)

More than the other two films though, *The Thin Red Line* deflates the notion that audiences are thirsting for fresh re-examinations of World War II—because that's exactly what this unpopular film is. Bear in mind: *The Thin Red Line* departs from its historical touchstone as much as the other films. But where Benigni employs denial and Spielberg alternates between mindless intensity and disposability, Malick has fused his voice with a literary sensibility—that of war novelist James Jones—and emerges with an original work that seems more bona fide and engaged with the period, while paradoxically remaining very much detached from the action.

This is largely due to Malick's discerning choice of source material. He has found a kindred spirit in Jones, who was always more concerned with an evocation of internal terrain than one of the fields of Guadalcanal. So here again is Malick's deflected use of voice-over, as soldiers reflect at length on violence that we hardly see: "I just killed a man—the worst thing a man can do—worse than rape,"

muses one soldier in close-up.

It's a passage like this that identifies *The Thin Red Line* as clearly superior to the others in terms of metaphysical depth and ambitiousness. Still, Malick indulges a taste for the pretty aside to an extent that imperils his film's immediacy. He has written a new introduction to the story that unravels in a tropical idyll—AWOL soldiers frolicking in

clear turquoise water with native children. The effect of such a set-up is not inconsequential, but the establishment of a very '90s, eco-aware context of verdant nature defiled by the artifice of war. But given the film's already slim narrative thread, the subsequent

shots of colorful animals in strange observance of the fighting seem somewhat mischievous, and work to distance our identification with the large cast, which is splintered to begin with.

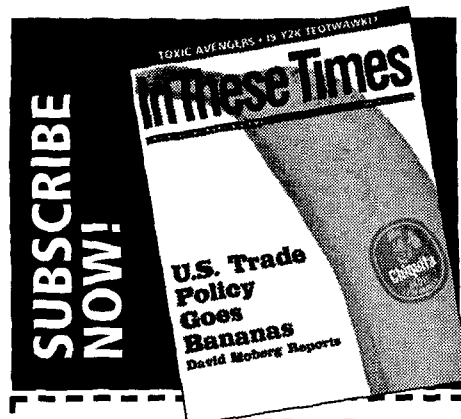
What is left is a rambling, quasi-spiritual experience that distinguishes *The Thin Red Line* as less a World War II film—or a Nick Nolte or Sean Penn film, for that matter—than, undeniably, a Malick film. For fans of Malick this was good news, signaling the survival of personal filmmaking on a grand scale.

But *The Thin Red Line* is, without doubt, an expression of an indulged and secure point of view—as are *Saving Private Ryan* and *Life Is Beautiful*—locating us very much where we are now: more than 50 years past the crucible of World War II, looking back to a time of great gravity, but only looking.

Maybe that's the best that film can do. ■

Joshua Rothkopf is a writer and filmmaker living in Chicago.

Moviegoers have been leaving screenings of *The Thin Red Line* miffed, because what they really wanted was, as Spielberg put it, "a bad-ass World War II movie."



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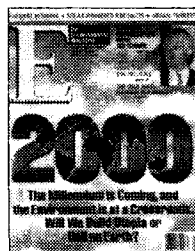
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Previous page: drumming group Oba Ilu;
 Above: José Carlos Acosta, saxophonist
 Siete del Corazón.

Continued from page 38

In Havana music is seemingly everywhere, emanating from rooftops, open windows and street corners. As musician and impresario Ry Cooder put it in the liner notes to *Buena Vista Social Club*, the hit 1997 son sampler, "in Cuba the music flows like a river." Apart from the island's famous *sones* of the "Guantanamara" variety, Cuba's early historical position as a global crossroads has also given the world the rumba, bolero, mambo and cha cha cha—and provided indispensable new contributions to jazz, big band, hip hop and classical music.

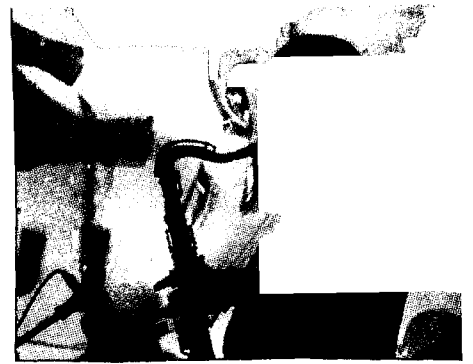
It is this musical legacy, not the vexing political questions of the day, that inspired distinguished photographer Lionel Delevingne to seek out some of the island's best musicians—whose sounds will surely outlive any ruler, on either side of the Florida Straits. —**Joe Knowles**





Clockwise from upper left:
a tango lesson in Old
Havana; percussionist
Pancho Terry; jazz group
El Siete del Corazón;
violinist for Veinte Siglo.

Havana's Rivers of Sound



Photographs by Lionel Delevingne

T

he aspect of Havana that struck me the most when I visited Cuba last summer was not its famed architecture, though the city's wealth of buildings, from the colonial period to art deco, easily rank among the most enviable in the world, even in their often crumbling state of magnificent disrepair. Nor was it the ubiquitous Communist sloganeering in lieu of commercial advertising, so utterly foreign to my American experience of total market immersion—and so quaintly passé, in this age when ideology is supposed to be dead. Rather, the the most immediately striking feature of Habañero life—and what most defines the city and its radiant people—is the music.

Continued on page 35